



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week began with President Bush's final State of the Union address, in which support for democracy abroad was affirmed, but less prominently than in previous addresses. Bush also signed the 2008 Defense Authorization Act into law, while asserting his privilege to ignore certain provisions that he sees as violating the constitutional powers of the executive. Debates continued in Washington over the crisis in Pakistan and the state of political progress in Iraq. This week kicks off with President Bush releasing his budget request for fiscal year 2009 today, while the House will later this week markup a bill addressing refugee populations and human rights in the Middle East and North Africa.

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 3, 2008

Legislation

From Monday (2/25) through Thursday (2/28), the Senate debated two bills proposed by **Senator Russ Feingold** (D-WI): [S.2633](#), cutting off any funds for deploying troops after 120 days, with the exception of temporary targeted missions; and [S.2634](#), requiring a report on the global strategy for combating and defeating al Qaeda, including the redistribution of US forces to meet the threat of al Qaeda. Neither bill was approved, but their consideration marked the renewal of Congressional debate on Iraq.

On Tuesday (2/26), [H.R.5488](#), sponsored by **Rep. Maxine Waters** (D-CA), to provide for the recovery and stability of Iraq, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bill would establish the position of an "Iraqi Displacement Coordinator" to lead "the United States Government effort to respond to the crisis confronting displaced Iraqis, including refugees and internally displaced persons."

On Wednesday (2/27), [H.RES.185](#), sponsored by **Rep. Jerrold Nadler** (D-NY), expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the creation of

refugee populations in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf region as a result of human rights violations, was agreed to be considered under suspension of the rules by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

On Wednesday (2/27), [H.RES.951](#), sponsored by **Rep. Scott Garrett** (R-NJ), condemning the ongoing Palestinian rocket attacks on Israeli civilians, was agreed to be considered under suspension of the rules by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

On Thursday (2/28), [H.RES.1008](#), sponsored by **Rep. Mark Steven Kirk** (R-IL), condemning the persecution of Baha'is in Iran, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Committee Hearings

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs (Tue 2/26): **Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight** and the **Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia** held a joint hearing entitled, "[Iraqi Refugees: Can the U.S. Do more to Help?](#)" The Honorable [L. Craig Johnstone](#), Deputy High Commissioner of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and [Mr. Rafiq Tschannen](#), Chief of Mission for Iraq and Jordan of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), were witnesses. [Click here](#) to view a video webcast of the hearing.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Thur 2/28): held a hearing entitled "[U.S. Policy Options in Post-Election Pakistan.](#)" Deputy Secretary of State [John Negroponte](#) was the featured witness. Opening statements were given by [Chairman Joseph Biden](#) (D-DE) and Ranking Member [Richard Lugar](#) (R-IN).

The House Appropriations Committee (Thur 2/28): the **State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee** held a hearing on the Department of State Operations Budget. **Patrick F. Kennedy**, Under Secretary for Management, testified (text of testimony not yet available).

In Washington

Questioning Policy in Pakistan: In addressing the Bush administration's [policy of support](#) for [Pakistan's political leadership](#), some agreed that the U.S. [should adopt a longer term approach](#) that [emphasizes democratic institutions](#). Some recounted the [pleasant surprises](#) of the [Pakistani elections](#) and [contemplated](#) the [future](#) of the [leaders of Pakistan](#), while others [argued](#) that Pakistan's elections are a cover for the continuation of a feudal power class system.

Urging Change in U.S.-Iranian Policy: Many [discussed](#) what they see as new opportunities in the U.S.-Iranian relationship and implored the U.S. government to [look beyond security concerns](#), arguing for a [multilateral approach](#) that could bring transparency to Iran's nuclear program, bring Iran into the international community, and allow the United States to [demonstrate leadership in resolving the Iranian nuclear dispute](#) as they interact with Iran.

American Policy in Iraq: in order to build on the achievements of the military surge, many believe the U.S. must [continue to support the elected government in Baghdad](#), helping it to [establish its authority](#) through the consensual exercise of power, [encourage provincial elections](#) as a [vehicle](#) for political reform and for loosening the hold of sectarian loyalty upon the political process.

Foreign Policy and 2008 Candidates: Several commentators [criticized](#) the mainstream media for being [derelict in their duty](#) to provide sustained and incisive analytical reporting on foreign policy issues. Meanwhile, in a speech this week, **Hillary Clinton** [addressed](#) the importance of supporting democracy abroad, stressing that she believes in “seeding” democracy and winning hearts and minds through work on human rights, democracy, and international development.

Also Worth Reading

Marina S. Ottaway, Nathan Brown, Amr Hamzawy, Karim Sadjadpour, and Paul Salem of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [have published an in-depth report](#) examining what they describe as “the new realities of the region,” focusing on three clusters of countries: Iran–Iraq, Lebanon–Syria, Palestine–Israel, and on three key issues—nuclear proliferation, sectarianism, and the challenge of political reform. The authors aim “to provide a new direction for U.S. policy that engages all regional actors patiently and consistently on major conflicts to develop compromise solutions.”

In the Middle East

Syria & the Deepening Lebanese Stalemate: In response to the increasingly dangerous situation in Lebanon, especially in light of [Saudi Arabia withdrawing its Ambassador from Damascus](#), many continue to [see](#) Syria as part, [if not all](#), of [the problem](#). Some analysts took the opportunity to highlight the [Assad regime’s recent crackdown on opposition leaders](#), and the [ramifications](#) of the [continued violations of human rights](#). In response to political tensions in Lebanon, the United States has [deployed](#) the USS Cole warship to the country’s coast, sparking debate as to whether this move [signals a more aggressive U.S. policy towards Syria](#), or if its purpose is to [deter Hezbollah](#) from attacking Israel if Israeli forces enter Gaza.

Religion, Freedoms, and Democratization: In a discussion on the [relationship between religious freedom and democratization](#) in the Middle East, some encourage the West to be [stricter with its standards for democratization](#) and to condition aid to the region on marked improvement. Other related topics addressed last week included: [discussion between religious scholars](#) on women’s rights under Islam in Saudi Arabia, the [status of the media](#) in the Muslim world, [human rights and the internet](#) in Morocco, the [ramifications](#) of Turkey releasing a [significant revision](#) of the Prophet Mohammed’s actions, and the Turkish AKP Party’s resolution on [repealing](#) the [headscarf ban](#).

Turkish Incursions into Northern Iraq: Many [expressed concern](#) over Turkish military action against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq last week, arguing that Turkey might have to [pay a very high price](#). On the other hand, others [argued](#)

that continued U.S. assistance against the PKK is positively affecting Turkish attitudes toward the U.S. and [benefiting the U.S.'s position](#) in Iraq.

Egypt: While some lauded Hosni Mubarak's regime for [easing regulations on religious designation](#) as a requirement to obtain an identification card, others [criticized](#) the regime for not appropriately addressing the concerns of religious minorities, saying that [it's not enough](#). Others [reacted](#) to [the arrest](#) of a Muslim Brotherhood leader and editor of their website.

Iran, its Elite, and Elections: In the first visit to Iraq by an Iranian president since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iranian President **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** made a [landmark trip to Iraq](#) on Sunday seeking to show that Iran is an influential player in Iraqi politics. In other news, some discussed the [emergence of a new progressive Iranian elite](#) who could one day help Iran and Washington negotiate an alliance, while others continued to speculate [who will win and lose](#) in the upcoming March elections.

Also Worth Reading

In a *Washington Post* [article](#) entitled, "Why I Have New Hope for the Mideast," **Robin Wright** acknowledges the many setbacks faced by movements for democracy and reform in the Middle East in recent years, but notes that "societies have not gone back to square one. The issue in the Middle East is no longer whether to seek political change. It's how to make it happen." Wright goes on to outline five lessons from her time reporting from the Middle East that give her hope for progress in the region.