



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week, while Congress was out of session for the 4th of July recess, heated debate continued in Washington over policy toward Iran, along with broader foreign policy debates in the context of the U.S. Presidential election. In the Middle East, concern persists over the escalating political crisis in Turkey, as arguments were presented in the case to ban the ruling AK Party, while 21 Turks were arrested on suspicion of plotting a coup. In the Arab world, the crackdown on dissent, particularly via blogging and the internet, continued to intensify. This week, as Congress returns for a busy month before the monthlong August recess, Iran will remain at the top of the agenda, as the topic of committee hearings in both the House and the Senate.

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

July 7, 2007

### *Legislation*

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

### *Committee Hearings*

Likewise, no hearings last week due to the Congressional recess.

## *In Washington*

**U.S. Covert Action Against Iran?** A report last week that the U.S. has been conducting [covert operations](#) aimed to [destabilize](#) Iran's religious leadership and [undermine](#) its nuclear ambitions sparked controversy and debate. Meanwhile, it was also reported that Iran is [seriously considering](#) a new offer of incentives and is willing to accept a 6-week suspension of its activities as [a precondition for starting talks](#). Meanwhile, some see [a division in Iran's leadership](#) regarding how to handle the standoff.

**Or an Israeli Attack?** This week, after an anonymous [Pentagon official](#) warned that [Israel may carry out an attack](#) on Iran's nuclear facilities, the [question looming over Washington is if and when an attack may take place](#) and [whether the U.S. would support](#) such action. Although the [State Department](#) and some in Israel [dismissed the claim](#), debate continued, [outlining the likely consequences](#) of an [Iranian retaliation](#), for [the United States](#), Iraq, and [Iran](#) itself. [Many](#) see America's [options](#) as limited and [adamantly](#) argued that [diplomatic talks with Iran](#) and [Syria](#) could improve the situation.

**Democracy Promotion and Radical Islam:** In [examining efforts](#) to promote democracy in the region, some argued that [success](#) may depend on [cultural prerequisites](#) and [international support](#). Many argued that [good governance](#) weakens public support for terrorists in the region, while [oppressive authoritarian regimes](#) lead to [radicalization](#) of the local population.

**Election 2008 and U.S. Foreign Policy:** This week commentators discussed Barack Obama's [plans for Iran](#) and [Iraq](#), and weighed the [pros and cons](#) of John McCain's proposal for a [League of Democracies](#). As Election 2008 continues, so does the debate surrounding [grand strategies](#) for [U.S. foreign policy](#) under a [new President](#). Some call for a new approach, after recalling [policy failures of President Bush](#) and of [previous administrations](#).

### *Also Worth Reading*

Be sure to check out last week's Middle East roundtable discussion at Bitter Lemons International, which focused on "[Lessons from U.S. and E.U. Democratization Programs](#)." In it, **Waleed Sadi** [argues](#) that the U.S. must recognize that "democracy needs to be nurtured and cultivated by creating a culture for democracy that does not arise out of nowhere." **Marina Ottaway** [urges the West](#) to work with open-minded members of the ruling elite and democracy advocates in the region to set modest goals, tailored to the conditions in each country, and to pursue them consistently. **Michel Nehme** examines the effects of [integrating moderate Islamists](#) into the political process, while **George Giacaman** [questions the sincerity](#) of U.S. efforts to promote democracy in the region.

## *In the Middle East*

**Escalating Political Crisis in Turkey:** Last Tuesday, Turkey's Constitutional Court [heard arguments](#) to ban the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP [defended itself](#) in court on Thursday and urged the Court to [make an urgent decision](#); though a ruling is not expected before August. The case has heightened instability in Turkey, highlighted by last week's arrest and detainment of 21 people, including two prominent retired generals, [for plotting a coup](#) against the government. The plotters reportedly [planned to gradually shake public confidence](#) in the AKP and force the military to intervene.

**Crackdown on Bloggers and Dissent:** Reports surfaced of [Syria's detainment](#) of at least five bloggers and cyber-dissidents. In conjunction with [similar crackdowns](#), Syria has gained the dubious honor of being the Arab World's [most repressive state](#) towards internet media. Also, Egypt's government is reportedly considering [blocking Facebook](#), which has been an important venue in mobilizing Egypt's disaffected youth. The social networking site is one of the few free political spaces in Egypt, and some worry it will leave the mosque as the only political space that remains. Meanwhile, exiled human rights activist **Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim** alluded to fears of arrest, [or worse](#), by Egyptian police, were he to return.

**International Opinion on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict:** This week WorldPublicOpinion.Org released [the results](#) of their [18-country](#) study regarding the [Palestinian-Israeli conflict](#). Most countries [favor the U.N. playing a robust role in peace enforcement, an even-handed approach to resolving the conflict](#), and have negative reviews of the role of Israel, Palestinians, the United States, Arab countries, and Europe.

**The Future of the Israeli-Hamas Cease-Fire:** Many are [pessimistic](#) that the cease-fire between Israel and Hamas [will not last](#) and argue that [neither party is prepared to agree to peace](#). Some, however, see [the latest diplomatic moves](#) as a positive sign, regardless of whether they immediately result in a long-term agreement.

**Update on Iraq:** Some questioned [the future of Awakening Councils in Iraq](#), especially after [recent violence against the Councils](#). Concern was expressed that **Muqtada Al-Sadr** may be forming an elite corps within the Mahdi army and some [predict provincial elections will be postponed](#).

**Al-Qaeda Resurgent?** Recent reports of al-Qaeda's growth in [Pakistan](#) have illustrated a [poor American policy](#) that [needs to be scrapped](#) in place of a coherent, sustainable policy that gets to the heart of the problem. [Al-Qaeda's growth in Algeria](#) seems to be an important threat, but some see indigenous radicals' alliance with al-Qaeda as a [sign of weakness](#).