



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week was busy on Capitol Hill, with bills introduced to strengthen sanctions on Iran and to dramatically increase aid to Pakistan for the next five years. Also, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved three of the annual appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2009, including the bill for State and Foreign Operations. Debates in Washington continued to heat up over policy toward Iran and Iraq, including some signs of shifts in U.S. policy toward each. In the Middle East, tensions in Turkey escalated with the arrest of 86 secularists suspected of plotting a coup. This week, Barack Obama's visit to the region is expected to stir up Middle East policy debates, while the House Appropriations Committee is tentatively scheduled to markup its State and Foreign Operations bill.

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 21, 2007

Legislation

On Tuesday (7/15), **Rep. Alcee Hastings** (D-FL) introduced House resolution [H.R.6496](#) to address the impending humanitarian crisis and potential security breakdown as a result of the mass influx of Iraqi refugees into neighboring countries, and the growing internally displaced population in Iraq, by increasing directed accountable assistance to these populations and their host countries, facilitating the resettlement of Iraqis at risk.

On Tuesday (7/15), **Sen. Joseph Biden** (D-DE) introduced Senate resolution [S.3263](#) to authorize aid for Pakistan from 2009 to 2013 in order to promote an enhanced strategic partnership with Pakistan and its people. The proposed \$7.5

billion aid package seeks to enhance the bilateral relationship by broadening the aid from mere security issues to economic, social, and governance sectors in order to better engage the Pakistani people.

On Tuesday (7/15), **Sen. Chris Dodd** (D-CT) introduced the [Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2008](#) [bill number not yet designated]. The bill expands pre-existing sanctions on Iran, strengthens enforcement techniques to prevent illegal transfer of technology to Iran, and authorizes state and local governments to divest from companies that invest in the Iranian energy sector. The bill was approved on Thursday (7/17) by the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

On Thursday (7/17), **Sen. Robert Menendez** (D-NJ) introduced Senate resolution [S.Res.615](#) urging the government of Turkey to respect the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Christian Church.

Committee Hearings

On Wednesday (7/16) the **Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs** of the **House Appropriations Committee** approved its Fiscal Year 2009 appropriations bill. The bill's funding totaled \$36.62 billion, representing a \$3.82 billion increase over FY08 levels. To read Subcommittee Chairwoman **Nita Lowey's (D-NY)** statement on the markup hearing, [click here](#).

On Thursday (7/17) the **Senate Appropriations Committee** approved Fiscal Year 2009 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations legislation. The bill provides \$36.62 billion in discretionary funding, \$3.82 billion above FY08 levels. To read the committee's summary press release of the markup hearing, [click here](#). To read POMED's notes on the markup, [click here](#).

In Washington

Shifts in the Debate on Confronting Iran? Last week, debates focused on Iran and [whether an Israeli or U.S. attack is likely](#) or [merely a bluff](#). While many [conclude](#) that [an attack is either not in either country's strategic interests](#) or is ["beyond reach under almost all circumstances,"](#) the possible [consequences could be dire](#).

Recommendations regarding how the U.S. should respond to Iran focused primarily on [sanctions](#), [missile defense](#), [diplomacy](#), and [long-term](#) efforts to promote [conditions for democracy](#). **John Bolton** argued strongly against diplomacy, and urged the U.S. to ["place no obstacles in Israel's path, and to facilitate its efforts where we can,"](#) however, many [disagreed](#), arguing that an attack on Iran would [not deter their nuclear ambitions](#). Meanwhile, **Afghan President Hamid Karzai** declared that [Afghanistan will not allow the U.S. or Israel to mount an attack from its soil](#).

At the same time, [last week](#) saw many signs of a [thaw](#) in [diplomatic relations](#) with Iran. The [Bush administration decided](#) to [send an American official to participate in international talks with Iran](#), and there were reports that [the U.S. plans to establish a diplomatic presence in Iran](#) by [establishing a U.S. interest section](#).

Many [see this as a significant](#) shift in [President Bush's foreign policy](#). In addition, **President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** signaled his interest in [unconditional direct talks](#) with the United States.

Timetables and SOFA: Last week, after the U.S. abandoned efforts to create a Status of Forces (SOFA) agreement with Iraq, many [blamed](#) its failure on **President Bush's** [refusal to include a timetable for withdrawal](#) despite [widespread](#) support by [majorities in both Iraq and the U.S.](#) [Paradoxically](#), this week the countries announced an intent to sign a "memorandum of understanding" which will [likely include a "time horizon" for withdrawal of some troops](#). Iraqi **Prime Minister Maliki** drew lots of attention by [endorsing the 16-month plan](#) for withdrawing troops advocated by **Sen. Barack Obama**.

Responding to Pakistan's Political Crisis: In light of increasing [concerns](#) for Pakistan's stability after a [stock exchange riot](#), which many believe reflects [a deepening political and economic crisis](#), **Senators Richard Lugar (R-IN)** and **Joe Biden (D-DE)** introduced the [Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2008](#) to provide \$7.5 billion in aid directed toward [social and economic development](#). Additionally, [speculation of a U.S. raid](#) in Pakistan was raised when the Afghanistan Cabinet Meeting [castigated Pakistan Intelligence for breeding terrorism](#) and halted meetings with its neighbor, leading many to warn that such intervention would [irreparably damage Pakistan's economy](#).

Development and Diplomacy: This week **Secretary of Defense Robert Gates** [repeated a call for greater funding for U.S. diplomacy and foreign development aid, noting the rising importance of nation building](#). Likewise, a survey conducted by the [Center for U.S. Global Engagement](#) of active duty and recently retired military officers showed that 80% of those polled believe [the use of diplomacy and development is important to achieving national security objectives](#), and want the U.S. to strengthen the use of these tools. Meanwhile, [others recommended](#) this week that the U.S. should reform its foreign aid to [prevent crisis before they occur and consolidate progress when crisis subside](#).

10th Anniversary of IRFA: This week marked the 10th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act, [described by President Bush](#) as having "placed religious liberty where it belongs - at the center of U.S. foreign policy." The law created the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) to monitor religious freedoms abroad and designate "countries of particular concern" for their [ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom](#).

Changing Pace in Afghanistan: Because Afghanistan is experiencing [stagnation and deterioration of its development](#), as well as [government corruption](#), some recommended that the U.S. focus on more effective aid and limit its military objective.

U.S. Involvement in the Levant: Debate continued over [whether the U.S. should give assistance](#) to [Lebanon's Armed Forces](#). This week some argued for [the U.S. to renew its role in Israel-Syria negotiations](#).

Campaign '08: It was a busy week for **Barack Obama**, who [sat down for a interview](#) with **Fareed Zakaria**, issued a major [foreign policy speech](#), and published an [op-ed in The New York Times](#) laying out his [plans for Iraq](#) and [the](#)

region. [Critiques of Obama's proposals ranged](#) from [supportive](#) to [full-blown enraged](#). Some argued that Obama [flip-flopped](#) on the [issue of Iraq](#), while [others ultimately sided with Obama](#). **John McCain** also [spoke on Iraq and Afghanistan](#), leaving some to [wonder](#) whether he can engender the international cooperation he is hoping for in Afghanistan while [others support his plans](#) over Obama's. Meanwhile, [many in the region do not believe either candidate will dramatically transform U.S. policy abroad](#). This week all eyes will be on Obama's [trip to the Europe and the Middle East](#), on which he has already visited [Kuwait](#), [Afghanistan](#), and [Iraq](#).

Also Worth Reading

Andrew Sweet and **Natalie Ondiak** at The Center for American Progress have released a new report, "[The Cost of Reaction: the Long-Term Costs of Short-Term Cures](#)," which examines how inconsistent U.S. foreign aid has undercut long-term security needs in various countries abroad, including Pakistan and Afghanistan. They conclude that although U.S. aid does spike during crisis, the U.S. fails to invest in "preventing crisis before they occur or to consolidate progress when crisis subside."

In the Middle East

Turkey's Pending Crisis: [Turkey's ongoing political crisis](#) continued this week after [86 secular Turks were arrested on terrorism charges](#) for allegedly plotting to topple the government. This week many examined the highly-explosive [AKP and Ergenekon cases](#) and their [potential consequences](#). Many are concerned that the conflict [undermines the legitimacy of Turkey's government, making democratization more difficult](#), and [called for the U.S. defend the democratically elected government](#). Some, however, are [optimistic](#) that both sides will discover a new way forward. Meanwhile, some suggest this conflict will [destroy any chance of Turkish E.U. membership, especially in light of the formation of the Mediterranean Union](#).

Lebanese Unity Government in Place; Prisoner Exchange Victory for Hizbullah? The long-awaited Lebanese [unity government](#) was in place by early last week, an act that managed the difficult feat of drawing praise from the U.S. [State Department](#) and also [from Iran](#). Some cautioned [against too much optimism](#) of seeing real "unity" from rival factions that were at a political standoff for so long. Also last week, five Hizbullah members were freed from prisons in Israel in exchange for the bodies of two captured Israeli soldiers. Many declared the swap a [victory for Hizbullah](#), while others [lamented that by recognizing Hizbullah, Israel reinforced the idea that violent strategies bear more fruit](#). Some [questioned whether the war was worth it in the first place](#), and others [worry](#) the swap marks [the end of the recent period of Lebanese independence from Syria](#).

Update on Iraq, Elections, and Sadr: The [vote on Iraq's provincial elections law was postponed this week](#), after Kurdish Parliament members walked out in protest, leaving some to suggest that [time alone will not resolve the underlying political problems](#). In regards to the surge, some believe the military campaign has [inadvertently aided the Sadrists](#), while others argue that it has [proven to be a](#)

[setback for the movement](#), both politically and with respect to their militia. Meanwhile, some warn that [the plight of Iraqi refugees](#) could negatively impact [regional stability](#).

Nuclear Negotiations: A leaked Iranian letter, responding to the P5+1 incentives package, indicated that while Iran [is not interested in forgoing its nuclear program](#), [the country is interested in negotiating a broader peace and security deal](#).

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei [refused to stop Iran's nuclear program as a precondition of talks](#). In related news, [Saudi Arabia allegedly offered a lucrative arms contract to Russia if it curtails its cooperation with Iran](#).

Syria Steps Out of Isolation: This week, [an Israeli and a Syrian leader both attended the first meeting of the Mediterranean Union](#), with Iran warning Syria against [peace with Israel](#). At the session, Syria announced that it would open an embassy in Beirut and Lebanon an embassy in Damascus for the first time since Lebanese independence in 1943, but delays are already foreseen.

Threatened Independent Media in Egypt: A [draft bill](#), granting the Egyptian government [sweeping power over its media and internet access](#), was leaked this week. Many fear this law will be used as a pretext to crack down on journalists and political opponents. Meanwhile, this week [16 additional members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested](#) in Northern Egypt. On a related note, **U.S. Rep. Chris Smith** (R-NJ) discussed legislation to [bar U.S. internet companies from sharing information that could be used to silence political speech with repressive governments](#).

Also Worth Reading

The Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute held a discussion with **Bishop Thomas** of the El-Qussia and Mair Diocese in Upper Egypt, "Egypt's Coptic Christians: The Experience of the Middle East's Largest Christian Community During a Time of Rising Islamization." For POMED's notes on the event, [click here](#).