



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

With only a week left before the scheduled month-long August recess, Congress still has some work left to do. The House Appropriations committee had intended to mark up the FY09 State and Foreign Operations bill before the break (as was done [in the Senate](#)), but now it appears that this will not happen, as a housing bill and energy prices seem to be the top Congressional priorities for the week ahead. The GOP leadership has hinted that it may vote against adjourning for the break if a bill to address high energy prices is not passed. In Iraq, passage of the provincial elections law in Iraq was undermined by a lack of Kurdish support and fears that President Talabani will not ratify it. And all eyes are on Turkey this week as a verdict is widely expected in the case to ban the ruling AK Party.

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 28, 2007

### *Legislation*

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just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, notes the importance of U.S. support to the work of such NGOs, and urges Israeli and Palestinian leaders to follow the lead of the NGOs in pursuing a just and lasting peace. On Thursday (7/24), the bill was marked up by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and ordered to be reported by unanimous consent.

## *Committee Hearings*

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## *In Washington*

**US Military Policy in Iraq:** Last week, [many hotlydebated](#) comments by **Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki** in *Der Spiegel*, which implied his support [Barack Obama's 16-month plan for withdrawal of U.S. troops](#). His comments were made [in light of the recent agreement between al-Maliki and President Bush](#) to include a ["general time horizon" for meeting "certain aspirational goals."](#) Although an Iraqi government spokesman [claimed that the statement had been misinterpreted](#), [many suggested that they revealed the Iraqi government's true preference an early withdrawal](#) and [argued that doing so will strengthen Iraq's sovereignty and increase the legitimacy of its government](#). Others [disagreed, warning that the Iraqi government does not actually want a withdrawal](#) of U.S. troops, [but is forced to appease the rising nationalist sentiment during the upcoming Iraqi election season](#). Still others warn that [withdrawal](#) will push the [violent young state](#) over the edge, thereby [preventing any real chance for national reconciliation](#).

**Thaw in Relations:** This week, many including [Zbigniew Brzezinski and Gen Brent Scowcroft](#) reflected on [the likely consequences of the Bush administration's decision to open lines of communication with Iran](#). Some suggested it [reveals a lack of American leverage](#), although others argued that it signifies that [the collision course between the two countries can be averted](#).

**Surge in Afghanistan:** This week some [argued that calls for a surge in Afghanistan are misguided](#), and instead recommended that [the U.S. set more realistic goals](#), in light of the porous Afghan-Pakistan border and the region's

tribal, multi-ethnic nature.

**Building the Levant:** Some suggested a change in U.S. policy toward the Levant, advocating for the U.S. [to help build a Palestinian security force](#) in order to promote peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and [recommending that the U.S. continue to arm and train Lebanon's armed forces to serve as a viable instrument of the state.](#)

**Moderate Islamist Parties:** This week, [many discussed](#) the [rise of Islamist parties](#) in the region and [whether the U.S. should recognize them](#). Jordanian foreign minister **Marwan Muasher** argued that Islamist parties [must focus on issues of good governance and serious political reform](#) in order to gain support domestically or abroad.

#### *Also Worth Reading*

This week, the Project on Middle East Democracy held a panel discussion entitled "[Turkey's Political Crisis: Implications for the Middle East](#)" with **Abdullah Akyuz, Bulent Aliriza, and Omer Taspinar**. All of the speakers expressed strong concern for the pending case in Turkey's highest court challenging the ruling AK party's constitutionality, and agreed that it could have huge implications both for Middle East democracy as well as U.S. relations with Turkey and with other countries in the region. Also, POMED Research Associate **Alex Taurel** and Director of Advocacy **Shadi Hamid** co-wrote [a piece](#) in the *Christian Science Monitor* focusing on the same issue, urging the U.S. to condemn the case and stand by the democratic process.

### *In the Middle East*

**Iraqi Provincial Election Law Passed by Parliament, but a Step Backward?** Iraqi provincial elections [appear likely to be postponed](#) until at least [December 2008](#), as it appears that [President Jalal Talabani will likely not ratify](#) the country's [provincial election law](#) that passed last week. Because the law was passed as [Kurdish Iraqi Parliament members](#) walked out of Parliament, some predicted that [there could be a mass Kurdish boycott of the provincial elections](#), further weakening attempts at national reconciliation. On a related note, the [Sunni Iraqi Accord Front rejoined the al-Maliki government](#).

**Nuclear Wheeling and Dealing with Iran:** This week many speculated on [how Iran will formally respond](#) to the P5+1+US incentive package, as Iran has less than [2 weeks](#) to do so. Although some predicted that [Iran will react unfavorably to the freeze-for freeze offer](#), others believe Iran [will ultimately agree](#), and argued that the country's negative rhetoric is [merely an attempt to appease Iranian hardliners](#). On a related note, **UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown** called on Iran to [either halt its nuclear program or face stronger sanctions](#), while others are [skeptical of any change in Iran's policy as long as Ayatollah Khamenei remains in power.](#)

**Turkey's Political Crisis:** The world continues to speculate on [whether Turkey's highest court](#) will [ban the AKP Party from political participation](#), as it

[begins its deliberations next week](#). for the likely [political and economic consequences](#) in Turkey and [its implications for democracy in the Middle East](#). On a related note, [26 members of a secular ultranationalist group](#) were arrested for involvement in an alleged plot to overthrow the AKP-led government in a coup. However, some see the arrests as a politically-motivated response to the pending AK party case.

**Nuclear Ambitions:** Despite an Israeli official's statement that [Israel would not rule out any course of action](#) regarding [Iran's nuclear ambitions](#), many suggested that the signs of thaw between the U.S. and Iran [eliminated any realistic possibility of a preemptive Israeli attack](#).

**Morocco's Islamist Party:** Morocco's Islamist Justice and Development Party selected **Abdelilah Benkiran**, a leading moderate figure, as [the group's new leader](#). Despite the party's [focus on bread-and-butter issues](#), the party faces criticism by those who believe that [the party ultimately wants to implement sharia law](#).

**Al-Qaeda in Pakistan:** The debate over [CIA Director Michael Hayden's claim of a "near strategic defeat"](#) of the terrorist organization was renewed, with many examining the [growing strength of al-Qaeda in Pakistan](#), its [self-destructive](#) tendencies, and its ability to [recruit and export](#) its ideology. Meanwhile, **Amnesty International** released [a report detailing enforced disappearances in Pakistan](#), conducted with the complicity of the security and intelligence forces, usually under the pretext of terrorism related charges.

**Qatar's Rising Star:** This week some reviewed [Qatar's rise as a serious diplomatic player](#). Qatar has been able to find a distinctive niche due to its economic power, its strategic alliance with the U.S., and a [willingness to engage all regional actors](#). Debates continued around whether [the Lebanese agreement reached in Doha will ultimately separate Shi'a interests from that of Hezbollah](#), as well as whether the [fragile majority-opposition will fracture](#).

*Also Worth Reading*

**Marina Ottaway** and **Mohammad Herzallah** have released a Carnegie Paper entitled "[The New Arab Diplomacy: Not With The U.S. and Not Against The U.S.](#)" The paper examines how Arab regimes have been undertaking diplomatic efforts on their own, even against Washington's interests, in order to fill the region's diplomatic vacuum. They conclude that it still has yet to be determined whether this shift will last beyond this administration.