



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week was an extraordinarily busy week on Capitol Hill, with *eight* congressional hearings on Iraq, five of which featured General Petraeus and/or Ambassador Crocker. Another hearing examined the FY09 budget request for State and Foreign Operations. In the Middle East, Egypt saw the escalation of widespread protests, crackdowns, and arrests, along with very low turnout for municipal elections widely regarded as rigged in favor of the ruling NDP. This week debate in Washington will continue to focus on Iraq, along with an interesting congressional hearing Tuesday on interagency cooperation between the departments of State and Defense.

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

April 14, 2008

Legislation

On Tuesday (4/8), [H.R.5084](#), sponsored by **Rep. Christopher Shays** (R-CT), was referred to four House committees for consideration, after originally being introduced to Congress in January. The resolution would require the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Secretary of Treasury, Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of Defense, and the intelligence community to conduct ongoing assessments of the effectiveness of sanctions against Iran. If passed, the legislation would also compel the Secretary of State to compile such assessments into a report to be submitted to Congress annually.

On Tuesday (4/8), the **Senate Finance Committee** held hearings to examine Senate bill [S.970](#), sponsored by **Sen. Gordon Smith** (R-OR), which seeks to impose sanctions on Iran and on other countries for assisting Iran in developing a nuclear program. The

bill had originally been introduced in March 2007. The legislation includes text on Iran's secret nuclear program history and relationship with the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Also on Tuesday (4/8), **Sen. Edward Kennedy** (D-MA) introduced Senate bill [S.2829](#), which aims to make technical corrections to section 1244 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, providing special immigrant status for certain Iraqis.

Committee Hearings

On Tuesday (4/8) morning [General David H. Petraeus](#), Commander of the Multi-National Force-Iraq, and [The Honorable Ryan C. Crocker](#), Ambassador to Iraq, testified before the Congress on the situation in Iraq. In their first of a two-day testimony round both appeared before the **Senate Armed Services Committee**, with Chair [Sen. Carl Levin](#) (D-MI) and Ranking Member [Sen. John McCain](#) (R-AZ) presiding.

On Tuesday (4/8) afternoon, **General Petraeus** and **Ambassador Crocker** spoke on "[Iraq After the Surge: What Next?](#)" for the **Senate Foreign Relations Committee**, with Chairman **Sen. Joseph Biden** (D-DE) presiding and making an opening statement, along with Ranking Member [Sen. Richard Lugar](#) (R-IN). For POMED's notes on the hearing, [click here](#).

On Wednesday (4/9) morning, Petraeus and Crocker appeared before the **House Armed Services Committee** to discuss the status of the war and political developments in Iraq, presided by [Ike Skelton](#) (D-MO). For POMED's full notes on the hearing, [click here](#).

On Wednesday (4/9) afternoon, **General Petraeus** and **Ambassador Crocker** testified before the **House Foreign Affairs Committee** later in the day for a "Report on Iraq to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs." [Chairman Howard L. Berman](#) (D-CA) presided and made opening remarks.

On Wednesday (4/9) the **Senate Armed Services Committee** held a hearing "[To receive testimony on the situation in Iraq and progress made by the Government of Iraq in meeting benchmarks and achieving reconciliation.](#)" [Dr. Robert Malley](#), Middle East and North Africa Program Director of International Crisis Group, **Ret. General John M. Keane**, and [Dr. Andrew Bacevich](#), Professor of International Relations and History at Boston University, were featured witnesses.

On Wednesday (4/9), the **Senate Appropriations Committee** held a hearing on the [FY 2009 Dept of State and Foreign Operations Budget Request](#), with [Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) testifying before the committee. Committee Chairman [Sen. Patrick Leahy](#) (D-VT) presided. To view the video of Secretary Rice's testimony, [click here](#).

On Thursday (4/10) [The Honorable Robert M. Gates](#), U.S. Secretary of Defense, and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman **Admiral Michael G. Mullen**, testified before the **Senate Armed Services Committee** on the situation in Iraq, Chair [Sen. Carl Levin](#) (D-MI) and Ranking Member **Sen. John McCain** (R-AZ) gave opening statements.

On Thursday (4/10), **The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations** held a hearing entitled "[Negotiating a Long Term Relationship With Iraq.](#)" Two panels of witnesses

testified – the first featured testimony from [The Honorable David M. Satterfield](#), Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State, **The Honorable Mary Beth Long** and **Ms. Joan Donaghue**. The second panel included [Michael J. Matheson](#) of George Washington University Law School, [Michael J. Glennon](#) from the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy at Tufts, and [Ms. Ruth Wedgewood](#) from SAIS at Johns Hopkins University. Senators [Biden](#) (D-DE) and [Lugar](#) (R-IN) presided.

On Thursday (4/10) the **State, Foreign Operations Subcommittee** of the **House Appropriations Committee** held a hearing on [“U.S. Policy and Programs in Iraq”](#), with testimony from **Ambassador Crocker**, presided over by [Chairwoman Nita M. Lowey](#) (D-NY).

In Washington

Debates on Iraq, Iran Heat Up: As mentioned above, Washington was [abuzz this week](#) over the testimony of **General Petraeus** and **Ambassador Crocker** before four congressional committees, in which they touted [“fragile” progress](#) and called for a pause in drawing down levels of troops. Following their testimony, some [concluded](#) that Iran is now the primary threat in Iraq and many argued that [engaging Iran](#) to limit their activities in Iraq and gain their assistance in fighting the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr should be a [top priority](#), while others argued for [an even tougher stance](#) toward Iran. **President Bush** [gave a speech](#) on Iraq on Thursday in which he supported the Crocker/Petraeus recommendation of delaying the drawdown of troops and declared, “Iraq is the convergence point for two of the greatest threats to America in this new century — al Qaeda and Iran.” This spurred some criticism and [warnings](#) against conflating the two distinct threats posed by al-Qaeda and Iran. The Iraqi ambassador to the United States [urged](#) the U.S. [not to give up](#) on Petraeus’ counterinsurgency doctrine, as did [some American commentators](#).

Some commentators were disappointed that the assessment of Petraeus and Crocker did not include a clearer vision of [the next needed steps](#) in Iraq. Several analysts [argued](#) that an oversimplification and misreading of the political scene in Iraq is leading the U.S. to inadvertently strengthen Iran’s hand there, and that a withdrawal of U.S. troops is the best way forward at this point, while others [contended](#) that “there is still a marginally better case for staying than for leaving.”

Qadhafi Undermining Normalization of U.S.-Libyan Relations? An [editorial](#) warns that steady progress “is in danger of being derailed because of **Qaddafi’s** hesitation to free an ailing critic of the regime whom Libyan authorities had promised to release from incarceration in a psychiatric hospital.” It describes the case of **Fathi al-Jahmi**, a former provincial governor who has been jailed for the past four years for “calling for democracy and a free press, and for openly deriding Qaddafi’s cult of personality.”

Presidential Candidates and Middle East Democracy: One report last week examined the perspective of “leading policymakers” from the Arab world on [the future of U.S. policy in the region](#) and what they might expect from the next U.S. president, including thoughts on democracy promotion. Another examines [the long history of American interventionism](#) and looks at the term “neoconservative,” arguing that the three leading Presidential candidates actually hold similar views on the projection of American power and principles to those more closely associated with the neoconservative movement. Also examined last week were **Barack Obama’s** [proposed policy](#) of engaging inimical regimes, but his [refusal to engage](#) groups such as Hamas.

Also Worth Reading

A new report on the current policy situation in Iraq and alternatives to existing policy was released last week by the **United States Institute of Peace**. The in-depth report, entitled "[Iraq After the Surge: Options and Questions](#)," evaluates current conditions in Iraq and the current U.S. policy approach, and outlines two possible alternative policy strategies: a reduced, conditional commitment and an unconditional, near-total reduction of military commitment.

In the Middle East

Widespread Protests, Clashes with Police in Egypt: Last Sunday saw [massive strikes and protests](#), beginning with the large planned strike of textile workers in Mahalla el-Kobri, resulting in widespread violent clashes and several deaths as police clashed with protestors. Egyptian bloggers gave first-hand reports including [photographs](#), [videos](#), and [vivid descriptions](#): "sometime after 3pm, demonstrations broke out in El-Shoun Sq, chanting against price increases. Mubarak's police fired on the demonstrators.. A man and a child were killed.. Police trucks attacked.. Buses caught on fire.. Mass round ups of activists and citizens... Police gunshots heard throughout the town according to witnesses.."

The protests continued through Tuesday's municipal elections, which were marked by [very low turnout](#) and the [boycott](#) of the Muslim Brotherhood, who saw the vast majority of its candidates denied an opportunity to participate. Late Tuesday, Egyptian **Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif** [rushed to the scene](#) of the protests and promised factory workers a bonus of 30 days pay in an effort to calm tensions, while word spread on Egyptian blogs that May 4th, the 80th birthday of **President Hosni Mubarak**, will be the date for a [second general strike](#) across Egypt. Many observers [saw this week's events](#) as having "exposed the failures of President Hosni Mubarak's regime," and analyzed [what recent events mean](#) for [Egypt's future](#) and the problem of [presidential succession](#) after Mubarak. Others [focused](#) on the recent formation of "something resembling civil society." And on Wednesday, it was [reported](#) that **George Ishaq**, director-general of the *Kifaya* movement, was arrested by Egyptian authorities. On Friday, at least journalists who had covered the protests were arrested, but they were then [released](#) on Sunday.

Continued Tensions in Lebanon, Syria: Last week Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, **General Michel Suleiman** [threatened to resign](#) if the Parliament is unable to come to a vote for president by August. Both factions support Suleiman as a "consensus candidate" to fill the presidential vacuum that has persisted since November. Reaction continued to the previous week's [Arab Summit in Damascus](#), with differing analysis of the low turnout and boycotting of the conference by eleven Arab heads-of-state, as well as a look at Syria's [strained relationships](#) with Israel and with the United States.

Fighting Tests Fragile Democratic Government in Mauritania: Two people were killed and at least fifteen hospitalized in a "massive fire-fight" in the Tavregh Zeina neighborhood of the Mauritanian capital of Nouakchott last week, which [culminated in the arrest](#) of **Sidi Ould Sidna**, the suspect accused of killing four French tourists late last year,. Commentators [observed](#) that the fighting "placed the Mauritanian president, **Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi** in a precarious position...[and that] Abdallahi is fortifying

his position in such a manner suggests that he fears the other centers of power inside the country may not allow him to finish his term in office.”

Challenges in Turkey: Debate continued in reaction to the decision by the Turkish Constitutional Court to ban the AK Party, with some [arguing](#) this may serve to strengthen the AKP, which can now be viewed as in a winning position and “losing its appetite for consensual politics.” Others [contend](#) that “progress is threatened if the AKP is even perceived as pursuing a veiled Islamist agenda” by secularists. One analyst [focused on](#) Turkey’s relationship with the United States, and how “it is likely to be drawn more heavily into the Middle East by the Kurdish issue and Iran’s nuclear ambitions.”

Also Worth Reading

The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University has released a [fascinating new study](#) of the Iranian online public, which describes the Persian blogosphere as “a large discussion space of approximately 60,000 routinely updated blogs featuring a rich and varied mix of bloggers.” It also identifies four main poles around which the variety of blogs cluster: 1) Secular/Reformist, 2) Conservative/Religious, 3) Persian Poetry and Literature, and 4) Mixed Networks.