



Kuwait held Parliamentary elections over the weekend, in which four women won seats for the first time. Meanwhile, Akbar Ahmed, Muslim Scholar and interfaith leader, and former USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios are now among the latest to sign the open letter urging President Obama to support democracy and human rights in the Middle East. To add your signature to the growing list of more than 1100 names, [click here](#). This week, the Senate will consider the emergency supplemental bill, and POMED will release a new policy paper by Greg Aftandilian outlining a strategy for supporting democracy and human rights in Egypt. The paper's release will be marked by [a POMED event](#) on Capitol Hill in which Greg will be joined by Tom Malinowski of Human Rights Watch, Neil Hicks of Human Rights First, and Ambassador Ned Walker, former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt.

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 our blog, the [POMED Wire](#).

The Weekly Wire

May 18, 2009

Legislation

On Tuesday (5/12), **Rep. David Obey** (D-WI) introduced [H.R.2346](#), the emergency appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2009. On Thursday (5/14), the House [approved the bill](#) that provides nearly \$97 billion in funding for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq through September 30. The bill passed in a vote of [368-60](#), with [51 Democrats in opposition](#) over concerns that the administration is escalating the war in Afghanistan without a clear exit strategy. On Thursday, Sen. Daniel Inouye introduced a Senate version, [S.1054](#). The *Wall Street Journal* reports, "some Democratic senators, particularly **Russell Feingold**, have also criticized **Obama's** proposal, but the funding is expected to be approved there, possibly as soon as next week."

On Wednesday (5/13), **Sen. Carl Levin** (D-MI) introduced **S.1033** [text not yet available], the **Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010**.

On Thursday (5/14), **Rep. James McGovern** (D-MA) introduced [H.R.2404](#), a bill requiring the Secretary of Defense to submit to Congress by the end of 2009 a report

outlining the United States exit strategy for United States military forces in Afghanistan participating in Operation Enduring Freedom.

On Thursday (5/14), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, **Howard Berman** (D-CA) [introduced](#) legislation, [H.R. 2410](#), the **Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011**. The act aims to improve U.S. foreign policy efforts, especially in the areas of diplomacy and development. Among other things, the bill authorizes the hiring of 1500 additional Foreign Service Officers, ensures that the U.S. will meet its financial commitments to the U.N., establishes the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation to expand the number of U.S. students studying overseas, supports the administration's plan to double the size of the Peace Corps, and authorizes a plan to use short-term volunteers to respond to humanitarian and development needs worldwide.

Congressional Hearings

On Tuesday (5/12), **Ambassador Richard Holbrooke** appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to discuss the administration's [new policy toward Pakistan](#). Opening statements were given by Senators [Kerry](#) and [Lugar](#), in addition to [Ambassador Holbrooke](#). Holbrooke focused on the importance of strengthening Pakistani democracy and providing the necessary resources to enhance civilian capacity. In light of the increased funding proposed by the Kerry-Lugar legislation and the emergency supplemental bill, some committee members expressed concern over the clarity of objectives and proper measures of accountability. For POMED's notes on the hearing [click here](#).

On Wednesday (5/13), Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources **Jacob Lew** appeared before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to discuss President **Obama's** [2010 budget request for international affairs](#). The administration's proposed budget would double foreign assistance by 2015, and double USAID overseas personnel. Opening statements were made by [Chairman Berman](#) (D-CA) and [Deputy Secretary Lew](#). For POMED's notes on the hearing, [click here](#).

On Thursday (5/14), Ambassadors **Jeffrey Feltman** and **Robert Blake** appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for their confirmation as Assistant Secretaries of State for Near Eastern Affairs and South and Central Asia respectively. **Senator Casey** (D-PA) presided over the hearing and stressed the importance of these two regions to U.S. national security. During the Q&A the nominees fielded questions on Iran's nuclear program, Arab-Israeli peace, prospects for a Palestinian unity government, and the ongoing crises in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The full text of the opening statements by Ambassadors [Feltman](#) and [Blake](#) are now available, and for POMED's notes on the hearing [click here](#).

In Washington

Mideast Leaders Set to Visit Washington: Last week, the White House [announced the dates](#) for the visits by the leaders of Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinian Authority. Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** arrives today, May 18, with Egyptian President **Hosni Mubarak** visiting next Tuesday, May 26, and PA President

Mahmoud Abbas in Washington on May 28.

Egypt Speech Will Force Decision on Democracy: With **President Obama** set to deliver his much-awaited speech [from Egypt](#), many are questioning what this means for the future of [democracy promotion](#). One analyst posed that by choosing Cairo as the venue for his speech Obama is [undercutting his message of respect](#) for the Muslim world. Another [argued](#) that "the choice of Cairo is already being interpreted by many Arabs and Egyptians as proof that Obama has [abandoned democracy and human rights promotion](#)." It was also [pointed out](#) that "the Obama administration is in danger of missing one of the most important contributory factors to the widespread unpopularity of the United States in the region in recent years - the perception that the United States is the power behind the throne of the region's [unpopular autocratic rulers](#)." And one commentator noted the [difficult question](#) the president will now have to face: "How can America engage with governments of all types abroad, while simultaneously building trust and partnership with their citizens?" Others cautioned against looking to the [fall in oil prices as a fix](#) to democracy promotion's woes.

U.S. on the Human Rights Council: Last week, as the [U.S. was elected](#) to a three-year term on the U.N. Human Rights Council it was argued that the [U.S. can do little with its one vote](#), so by joining, it has simply become "part of the problem." Another pointed to the [non-competitive nature](#) of the council's elections, arguing that placing political considerations ahead of human rights and "the absence of competition suggests that states that care about human rights simply don't care enough."

Changing Course in Afghanistan: As **General David McKiernan** was [replaced](#) by **Stanley McChrystal** as head of NATO forces in Afghanistan, many pointed to the [shift in tactics](#) from conventional warfare to [counterinsurgency](#). Although, some are [pessimistic](#) that the same strategy used in Iraq will be effective in Afghanistan. One analyst commented that [despite the change in leadership](#), **President Obama** and **Secretary Gates** don't have a concrete plan to achieve their goals in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, others highlighted [some of the strengths](#) of the administration's new approach and argued, "the most welcome aspect of the new policy is the emphasis on Afghanistan and [Pakistan's](#) civil institutions over individual leaders." Additionally, the Congressional Progressive Caucus released a [set of recommendations](#) that included an 80-20 ratio in political-military funding, the immediate cessation of drone attacks, and initiating a role for Saudi Arabia in negotiations between the Afghan government and tribal leaders.

Also Worth Reading

Brookings has released a new [report](#) by **Tamara Cofman Wittes** and **Andrew Masloski** titled "Democracy Promotion Under Obama: Lessons from the Middle East Partnership Initiative." Wittes and Masloski examine MEPI's record and conclude that the initiative represents "a small-scale, successful model of 'democracy diplomacy' that integrates foreign assistance with foreign policy...As such, the program suggests the value of tying foreign aid more closely to foreign policy, and moving at least some aid authority in-country and closer to the ground."

In the Middle East

Women's Gains in Kuwait and Beyond: On Saturday, women [won four seats](#) in Kuwait's [parliamentary elections](#), a first in the Gulf nation's history. Yet, while this occasion is surely momentous, one analyst argued that these elections "[will not resolve the country's deeper political crisis](#)." The crisis in question? "Three elections in the last three years, the 6th government about to be formed in less than four years, and a sense that Kuwait cannot take any big decisions because of the stand-off between the government and the parliament." Prior to the historic outcome in Kuwait's elections, others had pointed to [signs of progress](#) for women's rights "from the women who gained 25 percent of the seats in Iraq's provincial elections Jan. 31, to the two Palestinian women in the West Bank who appear to be the first female sharia judges in the Middle East."

Islam, Democracy, and the Ongoing Debate: Using Indonesia and Turkey as models, one analyst argued, "these examples may not offer a blueprint for the mostly undemocratic Arab world but their success does offer welcome evidence that [Islam and democracy can coexist](#), maybe even integrate." However, some remain skeptical over the necessity of [engaging Islamists](#), thinking that [dialogue is dangerous](#) because it gives too much attention to these groups at the expense of more liberal voices. But with the popularity of political movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, many argue that outright suppression or simply ignoring their significance [could lead to the return of extremism](#) and terrorism in places like Egypt.

Roxana Saberi Released from Prison: Last Monday, the Iranian-American journalist being held in Evin prison since January was [released](#) after an appeals court [reduced her sentence](#). Many weighed in on the [implications of this move](#). Some [posed](#) that her release is either a demonstration by Iran's government that it is capable of acting in good faith or the "presidency of **Barack Obama** has so flummoxed the Iranian leadership that they have no choice to vary their routine." Others [argued](#), "**Ahmadinejad** certainly could have used this trial as an election-year saber-rattling opportunity; that he chose not to suggests he sees it in his political interest to make nice with the West, not something that can usually be said about Iranian leaders." Meanwhile, **Richard Holbrooke's** adviser on Iran, **Vali Nasr** was [rumored](#) to have been in Tehran, and it was [speculated](#) that the visit was probably linked to Saberi's release.

A Bottom-Up Approach to Mideast Peace: One commentator argued that [Palestinian nation-building](#) must occur if peace with Israel is to be established. The failure of top-down strategies in peace plans such as the Oslo Accords has brought to light the "institutional weakness of Palestinian civil society, which lacks the infrastructure necessary for nation-building." However, efforts toward bottom-up strategies in Jenin, Bethlehem, and Hebron in the West Bank provide signs of encouragement. **Tony Blair**, an [advocate of this approach](#) explained, "you cannot create this two-state solution unless you build a Palestinian state from the bottom up as well as try to negotiate the contours of the state from the top down."

Lebanese Elections and the Greater Arab World: One commentator offered an analysis of the significance of [Lebanon's parliamentary elections](#) to the broader Middle East. It was explained that "the elections may be an important step in clarifying if Lebanon and the entire region move toward more secular, non-sectarian and meritocratic governance systems, or sink deeper into the current regional trend

where religion, ethnicity and sect are playing a greater role in life, power, and identity."

Caught Between Tradition and Modernity in Oman: There was an interesting article last week on the "[stirrings of discontent](#)" in Oman. It was explained that as the country has undergone some positive changes over the years, "Oman has also discovered that it is difficult to open the doors to modernity, especially to education, without also fostering a degree of cynicism about authority and a desire for more freedom. That, and the reality that its oil may soon run out, is what Oman is wrestling with today."

Sheikh in Torture Video Detained: It was [reported](#) that the United Arab Emirates has detained a member of the ruling family, **Sheikh Issa al-Nahyan**, who was [filmed brutally torturing a man](#) in 2004. Public prosecutors have begun a criminal investigation of al-Nahyan, after the UAE previously said the matter had been "resolved privately."

Also Worth Reading

At *Foreign Policy*, addressing Obama's upcoming speech in Egypt, **Tom Malinowski** [posed the following question](#): "Having begun to restore America's moral authority, how will Obama choose to use it in Egypt and beyond?" He explains that "if the great promise of the Obama presidency lies in his ability to connect with people who have lost faith in America, then realistically, he will need to talk about more than building schools and creating jobs. He will need to address the sense of injustice and indignity caused by dysfunctional and oppressive governments, and often - as is the case with Egypt - by the sense that America has too often been on the side of the oppressors."

In Case You Missed It

On Monday (5/11), the New America Foundation held an event titled "The Middle East Comes to Town" which focused on the upcoming Washington visits of Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**, Palestinian President **Mahmoud Abbas**, and Egyptian President **Hosni Mubarak**. The event was moderated by **Elise Labott**, State Department Producer at CNN, and included comments from a panel of experts followed by a short discussion segment. Panelists included **Rob Malley**, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Program at the International Crisis Group, **Shibley Telhami**, Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, **Daniel Levy**, Director of the Middle East Task Force at the New America Foundation, and **Amjad Attalah**, also a Director of the Middle East Task Force at the New America Foundation. For POMED's full notes on this event [click here](#).

On Thursday (5/14) The Hudson Institute hosted an event titled "Public Diplomacy: Reaching Difficult Audiences." The event comes on the heels of the Senate's confirmation of **Judith McHale** as Under-Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. The event was moderated by **Richard Weitz**, Director of the Hudson Center for Political-Military Analysis, and included a distinguished panel of media experts. The panel's participants included **Joan Mower**, Director of Public Relations at Voice of America, **Deirdre Kline**, Communications Director for the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, **Imad Musa**, Senior Producer at Al-Jazeera, and **Nargiz Asadova**,

Deputy Washington Bureau Chief for RIA Novosti. For POMED's full notes on this event [click here](#).