

POMED Newsletter, April-May 2007

POMED Updates

The past month and a half included a number of significant accomplishments for POMED. POMED's conference in Cairo last weekend was a great success, with coverage in the international and Arabic press (more details below). We also held another successful event in DC titled, "The Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian Regime: Toward Confrontation?" featuring our own Shadi Hamid and the Carnegie Endowment's Amr Hamzawy. An event summary can be found at [this link](#).

[Our blog](#) covering developments in Washington dealing with US democracy promotion policy, as well as important developments in the region is a terrific resource for anyone interested in POMED's issues. We recently began covering the presidential candidates' statements and their positions on issues that affect the Middle East.

In order to keep activities like these going, POMED needs your support, so please consider making a donation through our secure, online donation site. [CLICK HERE TO DONATE TO POMED](#).

POMED in the news

Media coverage of the Cairo and Amman conferences was excellent. The Amman conference was covered in the [Jordan Times](#), [Al-Dastour](#), [al-Ghad](#), al-Rai, and al-Arab al-Yawm, while the Cairo conference has been covered in the [Daily Star](#), the [Christian Science Monitor](#), Rose al-Yusuf, and an upcoming issue of al-Shabab, an Egyptian youth magazine. More info about the Jordan conference can be found on [our blog](#). The recommendations from the Amman conference can be [found here](#), and the detailed conference report [is here](#).

POMED associate Shadi Hamid was also featured on a panel discussion titled, "Backsliding on Reforms in the Middle East: A Short Term Detour or Dead End?" organized by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID). A recording of the discussion can be [found here](#).

Cairo Conference Update

On May 3-5, 2007, 60 young Americans and Egyptians (ages 18-28) gathered to discuss U.S. foreign policies in the region and to learn about each other's views on these issues. Over these three days, the participants discussed U.S. democracy promotion policy, the role of the US in the region, and worked towards developing greater mutual understanding of each other's views.

The conference provided an open forum for the American and an ideologically diverse group of Egyptian participants to directly engage each other about U.S. policy in the region and allow dialogue between them. But perhaps most importantly, by developing policy recommendations

in small groups and then debating, amending and ratifying those recommendations in general session, the participants used democratic processes to arrive at specific and concrete outcomes: policy recommendations that they can use as a foundation for future events on their campuses and in their communities.

The conference was co-sponsored by Americans for Informed Democracy (AID), the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), Model Egyptian Parliament at the American University in Cairo, and the Center for American Studies at AUC. It was planned, organized and conducted by a joint American-Egyptian conference planning committee.

Speakers at the conference included Alistair Baskey, of the US Foreign Service, Ashraf Swelam of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, Dr. Jerry Leach, Director of the Center for American Studies at AUC, Fadel Soliman, the Director of the Bridges Foundation, Mohamed Sobeih, the Palestinian delegate to the Arab League, Jawad Nabolsi, a member of the Ministry of Youth's committee on Leadership, Laurel Rapp, MENA Director for Americans for Informed Democracy, Rashad Mahmood, Vice Chair of the Project on Middle East Democracy, as well as several young activists from a wide array of political backgrounds.

American participants included students at Middlebury College, Syracuse University, the American University in Cairo, Georgetown University, the London School of Economics, Brown University, Stanford, Trinity University, as well as an international lawyer, and other young professionals. Egyptian participants included students at Cairo University, Ain Shams University, the American University in Cairo, a medical student, a financial consultant, and several other young leaders.

Legislative Update

On Capitol Hill, Congress continues to debate supplemental appropriations packages and hot-button policy on Iran and the Palestinian Territories. **Speaker Nancy Pelosi's** visit to Syria sparked renewed debate over U.S. policy toward that country. In a positive piece of news, the ADVANCE Democracy Act was passed out of Committee in the House. Meanwhile, events in Egypt and Turkey took a turn for the worse, but received no attention whatsoever.

The Supplemental Appropriations Package

Debates over dueling emergency supplemental spending bills have been at the forefront of lawmakers' agendas in both the House and Senate. These debates have focused primarily on competing benchmarks and pull-out plans. Amid various provisos and priorities, democracy-related programs and aid-levels have also been debated.

The appropriations debate began in the House. After overcoming the opposition of many liberals who preferred to cut war funds altogether, the Democratic leadership of the House was able to narrowly pass an initial version of the supplemental bill, [H.R. 1591](#), on March 23 by a 218-212 vote. The Senate passed its version March 29 by a 51-49 vote. The bill [passed](#) out of conference committee April 23, and the final version was passed [by the House](#) April 25 and [by the Senate](#) April 26. That bill was delivered to **President Bush** May 1, and he promptly vetoed it. Now, with the veto having been sustained by a vote in the House, the debate begins anew.

It is worthwhile to compare the House, Senate, and conference-approved bills. Both the House and Senate version contained benchmarks that the Iraqi government should meet. These include certain governance measures. Full backing from the U.S. would be withdrawn unless, or withheld until the Iraqi government has [excerpted from the Senate [version](#), Section 1710]:

1. *enacted a broadly accepted hydro-carbon law that equitably shares oil revenues among all Iraqis;*
2. *adopted legislation necessary for the conduct of provincial and local elections, taken steps to implement such legislation, and set a schedule to conduct provincial and local elections;*
3. *reformed current laws governing the de-Baathification process to allow for more equitable treatment of individuals affected by such laws;*
4. *amended the Constitution of Iraq consistent with the principles contained in Article 137 of such constitution; and*
5. *allocated and begun expenditure of \$10,000,000,000 in Iraqi revenues for reconstruction projects, including delivery of essential services, on an equitable basis.*

Likewise, each bill prohibited both the establishment of permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq and permanent U.S. control over any oil resource in Iraq. The House version required the redeployment of U.S. troops to be completed no later than August 2008, whereas the Senate and final version establish the non-binding goal of redeploying all troops no later than March 2008.

Foreign assistance programs received \$5.7 billion in the final version, including \$1.6 billion for economic reconstruction and related programs in Iraq, \$500 less than the president's request.

These programs include:

- \$620 million for provincial reconstruction teams
- \$354 million for disincentives for communities to engage in violence
- \$90 to help local governments provide essential services
- \$68 million for democracy and civil society activities
- \$140 million for training and development of a national government
- \$60 million for policy and regulatory reforms

Funding levels elsewhere are also noteworthy. Afghanistan received \$737 million in the final bill, similar to House figures and \$84 million more than the president's request. The final bill provided a total of \$770 million in economic and military assistance for Lebanon, more than double the amount granted in the House package, with this aid conditioned on Lebanese passage of an economic reform plan. This package also includes \$220 million in security assistance, mainly for police. The final version of the bill also contains \$80 million in aid for Jordan and \$110 million in aid to Pakistan, with various conditions attached. Finally, \$50 million is appropriated in the final package for the creation of a Civilian Reserve Corps, a goal the president outlined in his State of the Union address.

The Appropriations Committee provides [long](#) and [short](#) summaries of the final bill passed out of conference committee.

Iran

In the aftermath of the seizure by Iranian forces of 15 British sailors – a moment that many feared would lead to armed conflict – a sense of sobriety may have descended upon Congress. Members of Congress who oppose military action against Iran stepped up their efforts. Meanwhile, a more moderate version of a House bill to strengthen sanctions against Iran was introduced into the Senate.

On March 27, Senator **Jim Webb** (D-VA) [introduced an amendment](#) to the Iraq Emergency Supplemental which would have barred military action against Iran without the explicit authorization of Congress. This followed on earlier proposed stand-alone legislation to this

effect by **Webb** ([S.759](#)), **Senator Bernie Sanders** (I-VT) ([S.Con.Res.13](#)), and **Rep. Peter DeFazio** (D-OR) ([H.Con.Res.33](#)). Webb's amendment was ultimately withdrawn in order to assure timely passage of the supplemental.

The National Iranian American Council (NIAC) [reported](#) that **House Speaker Pelosi** (D-CA) has pledged to introduce separate legislation in the House reviving this language on Iran, and has asked the office of **Rep. Lantos** (D-CA) to draft such a bill. Pelosi and Lantos both [publicly supported](#) diplomatic engagement of Iran, though Pelosi stated that she has no plans to personally visit Iran. The same NIAC piece also reports that **Senator Byrd** (D-WV) is considering joining **Webb** and **Sanders** in an effort to insert such language on Iran into the upcoming defense authorization bill.

On March 22, **Senator Gordon Smith** (R-OR) and **Senator Dick Durbin** (D-IL) introduced [S. 970](#), the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act. Intended as a counterpart to the House bill ([H.R. 1400](#)) by the same name, the Senate version nonetheless contains important differences. S. 970 would tighten sanctions legislation against Iran and those who do business with the country, but it would also support the establishment of an international regime for assuring the supply of nuclear fuel for peaceful means. In addition, it omits House language stating that sanctions would stay in place until the President certifies that Iran has ceased efforts to produce WMDs, has been removed from the list of state sponsors of terror, and poses no significant threat to United States national security, interests, or allies.

The Palestinian Territories

Debate continued between leading Members of Congress and the White House regarding U.S. policy toward the Palestinian unity government – jointly controlled by Fatah and Hamas – and toward the Palestinian people as a whole.

Before the Mecca Accords and the formation of the Palestinian unity government, the policy of the State Department had been to fund only the Fatah-controlled presidency and security services in the hopes of strengthening it against Hamas. Since the Accords, some in Congress have called for a sharp change in policy. The State Department and White House, however, have resisted those calls, [refusing to rule out](#) contacts with some moderate Palestinians within the government.

Following the formation of the unity government, **Senator Bill Nelson** (D-FL) and **Senator John Ensign** (R-NV) circulated a [letter](#) to **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** implying that U.S. officials should have no contact with or aid to members of the Palestinian government, including Fatah members and the office of **President Mahmoud Abbas**. After the letter had been signed by 40 senators, it was withdrawn and revised so as to call only for a continuation of non-support for Hamas. That letter was signed by 79 senators.

On March 30, **Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL) introduced H.R. 1856, the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act Amendments of 2007. An [e-mail](#) sent to House staffers made clear that the intent of the legislation was to "counter attempts by **Rice** / State to deal with unity govt and send assistance to non-Hamas members of unity govt" [sic]. In addition, the legislation would add harsher sanctions that were stripped from the final version of the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006 before it was passed and signed into law. In contrast to the 2006 PATA bill, H.R. 1856 has no Democratic co-sponsors. It is therefore unlikely to move forward.

Also on March 30, Chairwoman **Nita M. Lowey** (D-NY) of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations [stated](#) that she would no longer stand in the way of an administration

request to provide financial assistance to Palestinian security forces. Since early February **Lowey** had blocked a Bush administration request to transfer \$86 million in funding to forces loyal to President Mahmoud Abbas. Under pressure from **Lowey** and others, the Bush administration eventually scaled back its request to \$59 million, satisfying the chairwoman.

Syria

On April 2-3, **Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi** led a delegation of seven lawmakers on a tour of Israel, Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Saudi Arabia. The visit to Syria was a political bombshell – both here in the U.S. and in Syria as well. However, it is unclear whether the visit had any real effects on policy.

The question of engaging Syria was raised by the [report](#) of the Iraq Study Group, which urged an aggressive regional diplomatic initiative that included Iran and Syria. Others, including [Brent Scowcroft](#), have embraced the idea of engaging Syria but not Iran. The American people support diplomacy with Syria by wide margins.

The White House objected to **Pelosi's** visit on the grounds that she was usurping executive powers and sending mixed messages to the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Syria remains on the list of state sponsors of terror. President Bush has accused the regime of providing material support to the insurgents in Iraq.

In Syria, the visit was enormously popular. POMED [covered](#) the positive reception **Pelosi** received in the Arab press during and following her trip. A month later, *The Washington Times* noted that **Pelosi** remains a [popular figure](#) in the country.

Politics aside, it comes as a surprise to see a progressive activist and human rights leader of the stature of **Nancy Pelosi** embracing such an autocratic leader. The Assad regime remains an anti-democratic outfit that oppresses its people and undermines democratic processes in neighboring Lebanon.

ADVANCE Democracy Act

On March 27, the House Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously approved [H.R. 982](#), the ADVANCE Democracy Act, moving it towards a vote in the full chamber. The bill was sponsored by **Representative Tom Lantos** (D-CA), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and co-sponsored by 17 Members of Congress—11 Democrats and 6 Republicans. In alphabetical order, cosponsors are: **Ackerman, Berman, Blumenauer, Boozman, Bordallo, Burton, Crowley, Drier, Holt, Jackson-Lee, Price, Ros-Lehtinen, Rush, Schiff, Schwartz, Smith, and Wolf.**

The ADVANCE Democracy Act is a key piece of democracy legislation that if passed into law would for the first time state officially that U.S. policy shall be "to promote freedom and democracy in foreign countries as a fundamental component of United States foreign policy." It includes many important provisions including commitments to use foreign assistance to encourage democratic movements and to require the U.S. Mission "in every nondemocratic or democratic transition country" to carry out a program for local democracy promotion. This act was first introduced in the 109th Congress and passed in the House as part of the Foreign Affairs Authorization bill, but the Senate version was never voted on.

Conclusion

With the Bush Administration reeling and the Democratic Congress content to base policy on polling as much as principle, our foreign policy in the Middle East is adrift. Across the region,

the U.S. is merely reacting to events – and then only slowly. In Egypt, the Mubarak government pushed through constitutional amendments that further gutted the space for political opposition, further narrowing the field of political contestation in the country to the delight of radicals. Though she was set to visit the country only a few days before the vote, **Secretary Rice** had almost nothing to say on the matter. Now Turkey's military threatens to undermine the country's civilian government because its parliament elected the current foreign minister—a moderate, pro-Western Islamist—as president, and once again, nothing. The disastrous intervention in Iraq has affected each Member of Congress differently, but with a common result—Congress feels burned and is increasingly reluctant to engage in the region.