

## **POMED Newsletter, March 2007**

### **POMED Updates**

There are several important announcements this month. First of all, POMED has launched a blog at [blog.pomed.org](http://blog.pomed.org) that discusses United States policy towards political reform in the Middle East. It also covers op-eds discussing the Middle East, as well as important events in Washington, DC on similar topics. Recent posts include mentions of the [constitutional referendum in Egypt](#), debate over [recognition of the Palestinian government](#), [updates on Afghanistan](#), and much more. Similarly, we have launched a calendar that is available at [pomed.org/calendar.php](http://pomed.org/calendar.php) that lists events of interest in the DC area. To subscribe to the blog, [follow this link](#).

#### *Update on POMED/AID Conferences*

We are now accepting applications for all three of POMED and Americans for Informed Democracy's (AID) "Bringing the World home" conferences in Amman, Cairo, and Rabat. [Click here for the applications for all three conferences.](#)

The [Amman conference](#), titled "U.S. Democracy Strategy: An American-Jordanian Dialogue" will take place from April 19-21. The conference will examine America's democratization initiatives in Jordan and develop strategies of how to more effectively enable Jordanians to work for democratic change, and the deadline for applications is March 30th. The [Cairo conference](#), "An American-Egyptian Youth Dialogue on U.S. Policy" will be held from May 3-5 and focus on the impact of US policies in the Middle East. Lastly, the [Rabat conference](#), "A Strategic Relationship? An American-Moroccan Youth Dialogue on Reform, Security and the Media" will be held May 25-26.

Americans and Middle Eastern students and young professionals are encouraged to apply. We seek an ideologically and geographically diverse group of participants. Please pass this information to anyone that may be interested.

### **Legislative Update**

On Capitol Hill, foreign policy debate continues to be dominated by Iraq, and the many contending Democratic proposals to restrict and end U.S. involvement in that country. Nonetheless, Members of Congress also debated legislation dealing with Iran, the Palestinian Territories, the 9/11 Commission recommendations, and Turkey.

#### Iran

On February 19, a [second American aircraft carrier](#) arrived in the Persian Gulf. The deployment marked the first time since the 2003 Iraq invasion that the US has stationed two carriers in the region, raising fears that the Bush Administration was stepping up preparations for war with Iran.

Members had already begun voicing concerns about a US attack on Iran. In a Feb. 7 hearing of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman **Ron Paul** (R-TX) asked **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** whether she could assure the committee that "the U.S. will not initiate a pre-emptive attack on Iran." **Rice** answered, "The President has made clear that we're not planning to attack Iran," but also listed a series of threats emanating from Iran including support for Hezbollah, support for Iraqi militias, and its nuclear program. "No government in the world would stand by and not react" to such threats, **Rice** said.

To highlight congressional opposition to a preemptive strike on Iran, **Senator Bernard Sanders** (D-VT) introduced S. Con. Res. 13, "Expressing the sense of Congress that the President should not initiate military action against Iran without first obtaining authorization from Congress," on February 15. On February 14, **Representative Rosa DeLauro** (D-CT) introduced H. Res. 163, which "affirms the requirement under the Constitution that the President seek and obtain the approval of Congress before the United States undertakes offensive military action against any other nation." On March 5, **Senator Jim Webb** (D-VA) [introduced S. 759](#) "to prohibit the use of funds for military operations in Iran."

**Chairman Lantos** held a hearing on March 6 entitled "The Iranian Challenge." In the hearing, **Lantos** placed himself in [opposition to a preemptive attack – at least for now](#) - by saying, "We are far from having exhausted all diplomatic and economic options for stopping Tehran's headlong pursuit of nuclear weapons. Talk of military intervention is unwise and unsupported by Congress and the American people." **Ranking Member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL) emphasized the need to tighten and enforce economic sanctions. She also declared that "engaging Iran or speaking to the Iranian regime would be a disastrous mistake ." **Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns** outlined [Bush Administration policy](#), insisting that "The United States is committed to pursuing a diplomatic solution to the challenges posed by Iran." He went on to reiterate **Secretary Rice's** June 2006 offer of multilateral talks in exchange for a suspension of nuclear activities.

Meanwhile, Members continued to work to strengthen economic sanctions against the regime. To that end, **Senators Russ Feingold** (D-WI) and **Jon Kyle** (R-AZ) introduced S. 527, The Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Enforcement Act, on February 8; **Representative Ros-Lehtinen** introduced H.R. 957, "To amend the Iran Sanctions Act of 1996 to expand and clarify the entities against which sanctions may be imposed," also on February 8; and **Representative Ros-Lehtinen** introduced H.R. 1357, "To require divestiture of current investments in Iran, to prohibit future investments in Iran, and to require disclosure to investors of information relating to such investments," on March 6. Most recently, **Representative Lantos** [introduced H.R. 1400](#), "To enhance United States diplomatic efforts with respect to Iran by imposing additional economic sanctions against Iran, and for other purposes," on March 8. This last bill was unveiled last week to coincide with the annual policy conference of the American Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and has the [full backing of the lobbying group](#). AIPAC spokesman Josh Block referred to it as one of the group's three priorities for the year, alongside maintaining aid for Israel and keeping aid from reaching Hamas. The bill would remove the executive branch's right to issue waivers to avoid sanctioning an ally that trades with the Iranian regime.

Iran's struggling democratic institutions were examined in POMED's January newsletter, in an article entitled " [Elections in Iran](#)." While far from perfect, Iranian elections have nonetheless

produced changes in the structure of power in the country three times since 1997. Iranian society also benefits from a relatively large and well-educated middle class, making it one of the best hopes for democratization in the region. However, in the aftermath of any U.S. attack, Iran's hardliners would almost certainly be strengthened at the expense of voices for moderation and reform.

### The Palestinian Territories

On February 8, Saudi-brokered talks in Mecca [led to an agreement](#) between Fatah and Hamas on the framework for forming a national unity government. For the Palestinians, the accords represent a welcome step toward ending factional violence and fulfilling the promise of democratic elections held more than a year ago. But some Members of Congress reacted negatively to the changed circumstances.

While calling on Hamas to "respect international resolutions and the agreements signed by the Palestine Liberation Organization," the [Mecca Accord](#) did not address the demands of the Quartet that the Palestinian government renounce terror and recognize the right of Israel to exist. Under a situation of comity and cooperation, rather than the emergent civil war of the past few months, U.S. financial support granted the President of the Palestinian Authority, Fatah's **Mahmood Abbas**, could now potentially become available to Hamas, a terrorist organization. The Bush Administration's FY07 supplemental request also included \$40 million for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides assistance for Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. The Administration planned to provide \$86 million in security assistance to Palestinian

In a February 16 hearing of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State Department and Foreign Operations, **Subcommittee Chairwoman Nita Lowey** [explained](#) that she had placed a hold on the \$86 million for **President Abbas'** security forces. Though she had done so prior to the Mecca Accords, **Lowey** said she felt even stronger about the hold after the Palestinian factions reached their agreement. The funds were to be reprogrammed from other unspent funds previously appropriated for the Palestinians. To do this, the Administration must notify the relevant committees of its intention. As a matter of informal protocol, committee members who object to the new use of funds may place a hold on the plan, either to obtain additional information or to block it altogether. **Representative Steve Israel** (D-NY) said there is "strong bipartisan support on this panel" for the hold on the \$86 million. He further suggested **General Keith Dayton**, the U.S. security envoy working with Israel and **President Abbas**, should not continue working with the Palestinians unless the unity government recognizes Israel and respects past agreements. **Secretary Rice** argued the worst case scenario in the Palestinian territories is for Hamas to be arming itself while **President Abbas** is not. **Representative Mark Kirk** (R-IL) may have expressed the majority sentiment most concisely: that the Committee supports Fatah if it is combating Hamas, but not if President Abbas is working with Hamas.

At the same hearing, **Representative Joe Knollenberg** (R-MI) asked **Secretary Rice** how State could ensure that Hamas does not receive any of the \$40 million requested for UNRWA. **Rice** responded that UNRWA has been audited and that more audits are needed, but ultimately, she said, "We need to get to the Palestinian refugees, which are some of the most desperate in the world."

## Implementing the Remaining 9/11 Commission Recommendations

Last week the Senate debated S. 4, the Improving America's Security by Implementing Unfinished Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. This is the Senate version of H.R. 1, the national security package passed by the House at the start of the Democrats' 100 hours agenda. Notably, the Senate version deletes Title XIV, the 9/11 Commission International Implementation.

Among other things, Title XIV would provide funds for expanding educational opportunity and civil society development in Arab and predominantly Muslim countries; mandate that the State Department to increase " U.S. scholarship, exchange, and library programs" in those countries; and reiterate U.S. goals of democracy promotion abroad. The section would make it U.S. policy to "promote over the long-term, seizing opportunities whenever possible in the short term, democracy, the rule of law, good governance, sustainable development, a vigorous civil society, political freedom, protection of minorities, independent media, women's rights, private sector growth, and open economic systems in the countries of the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia."

None of the amendments brought by Senators sought to fund the above projects or to recognize the value of those goals. The implication is that not a single U.S. Senator believes that the development aspirations of individuals and societies around the world – and U.S. support for those aspirations – is related to U.S. national security. The Bush Administration has called for a proactive approach that seeks to shape America's security environment by supporting development in weak states and democracy in autocratic ones (though, in practice, that policy has been executed only inconsistently). In contrast, the new Senate seems to favor a more isolationist approach: constructing a fortress America while neglecting the root causes of terrorism and international instability.

As of Friday, Senate Democrats had been unable to rally the votes sufficient to end debate and bring the measure to a vote.

### Turkey

On January 19, prominent Turkish-Armenian journalist and newspaper editor **Hrant Dink** was assassinated in Istanbul by the ultra-nationalist Turk, **Ogun Samast**. **Dink** had been prosecuted three times under Turkish law for "insulting Turkishness" by referring to the massacre of Armenians between 1915 and 1923 as genocide. This event brought renewed attention to the rights of Armenians in Turkey and to the controversy over the Armenian Genocide. Four related Congressional resolutions were proposed in the three weeks following **Dink's** assassination.

On January 29, 2007, resolution H. Res. 102 was submitted by **Representative Joseph Crowley** (D-NY) with 24 original cosponsors and referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee. It condemns the assassination of **Hrant Dink**, urges a full investigation into this act, and calls for the repeal of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which prohibits expression of thought denigrating Turkishness or the Turkish Republic, including any mention of the Armenian Genocide. On February 1, **Senator Joseph Biden** (D-DE) introduced a Senate version S. Res.

65, which adopts all three recommendations of H. Res. 102, and additionally calls on Turkey to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Government of Armenia.

The condemnation of **Hrant Dink's** assassination is uncontroversial, as it was officially condemned by **President Bush** and by numerous governments including that of Turkey. But these bills have encountered opposition because of their explicit mention of "the Armenian Genocide" in the *Whereas* clauses.

Most historians do consider the killing of Armenians between 1915 and 1923 as genocide, and though it is officially recognized as such by many national governments, 37 states of the U.S., and the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, such official recognition has never been granted by Congress or the U.S. President. This can be attributed to a reluctance to antagonize the government of Turkey, which represents not only an important strategic and military ally for the U.S. but also a crucial example of a predominantly Muslim, Middle Eastern nation with working democratic institutions.

On February 12, **Representative Crowley** introduced a weaker H. Res. 155, which repeats the 3 declarations of H. Res. 102 in condemning the **Dink** assassination, but omits any explicit mention of the Armenian Genocide.

On January 30, H. Res. 106 was submitted by **Representatives Schiff** (D-CA), **Radanovich** (R-CA), **Pallone** (D-NJ), **Knollenberg** (R-MI), **Sherman** (D-CA), and **McCotter** (R-MI), which calls on President Bush to "ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide." H. Res. 106 is the latest in a long line of proposed Congressional Resolutions whose primary objective is official U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide. None of its predecessors have been passed by Congress, but this one is widely regarded as having [a greater chance of success](#), owing to its somewhat weaker language and the current climate, including outrage over the **Dink** assassination. Speaker **Pelosi** [has consistently supported](#) such resolutions in the past and has stated her support for H. Res. 106.

H. Res. 106 also officially declares the number of Armenian men, women and children killed by the Ottoman regime to be 1.5 million, the high-end estimate frequently cited by the Armenian community. This figure is far more disputed among historians than the occurrence of genocide itself. The irony here is that legislating a questionable, precise death toll as fact comes dangerously close to the approach of the Turkish Government in legislating that such an event never took place.

## Conclusion

With few exceptions, Members of Congress continue to neglect democracy as either a policy goal in itself or a means to contributing to U.S. national security. Whereas President Bush spoke out against the evils of autocracy, but seemed unwilling to implement policies that reflected his rhetoric, the new Democratic majorities seem unwilling or unable to either denounce authoritarianism or act. As long as neither President Bush on the right, nor the progressive Left are seriously committed to the the long-term goal of supporting democratic change in the Middle East little progress will be made.

## America's Impact on Middle East Reform

Prof. Marc Lynch, who will be moving to George Washington University this next year wrote a compelling article on [his blog](#) about US policy towards democracy in Egypt. It is reproduced in its entirety here with his permission. Since this post last week, coverage of Egypt's referendum has increased dramatically, and there have been two think tank reports on the subject. [This one](#) from the Carnegie Institute, and [another from WINEP](#).

### [Baathism on the Nile](#)

In [five days](#) Egypt is scheduled to hold a national referendum on changes to its Constitution. Even veteran Egyptian opposition figures, well versed in the regime's authoritarian ways, have expressed shock at the choice of March 26 for the referendum. This is a travesty, a crude mockery of promises of political reform, and something which deserves widespread international mockery and condemnation. Here's why:

- The actual language of those changes was [only finalized](#) in a marathon Parliamentary session two days ago, giving the Egyptian citizenry less than a week to learn about the changes and make up their minds. Does anybody really think that voters could conceivably come to terms with the complex and varied changes on offer in such a short time? Of course not. That's the point. As al-Masry al-Youm bluntly reports, giving less than a week means that [there will be no chance](#) for any kind of real protest movement to take shape.
- The changes were passed almost exclusively by the ruling party. Over 100 opposition deputies - not only Muslim Brotherhood deputies, as has been widely reported - boycotted the final vote and demonstrated outside the Parliament during the proceedings. [NDP deputies quite appropriately](#) celebrated its "victory" by launching into the Baathist chant "With spirit, with blood, we sacrifice ourselves for you, oh Mubarak." This is what America's support for Egyptian "reform" has brought: Baathism on the Nile.
- The changes are blatantly, almost absurdly, [authoritarian and antidemocratic](#). Judicial oversight of elections will be eliminated; even NDP strategist [Ali al-Din Hilal admits](#) that this makes cheating much easier (which of course is the point). Contested Presidential elections will be virtually impossible, since candidates must come from a licensed party with so much representation in all elected bodies that in practice only the NDP will ever get over the bar. Parties based on religion would be explicitly banned, making it impossible for the Muslim Brotherhood to form a political party and participate openly in the political process. But it isn't just the MB: the regime, under NDP control, will retain an iron grip on the licensing of political parties, and judging by past practice will use this control to exclude not only the Muslim Brotherhood but any other promising political party. "Counter-terrorism" provisions will render a whole range of highly controversial, intrusive security practices Constitutional, making the de facto security state into a de jure security state.
- The NDP majority which passed the reforms was itself achieved through blatant electoral falsifications and fraud. The [most famous case is that of Gamal Heshmat](#), a popular Muslim Brotherhood Deputy, whose sweeping victory over NDP bigwig Mustafa al-Fiqi simply disappeared in the counting room; a whistleblower article by Noha al-Zeini, the

supervising judge, uncovered the fraud everyone suspected but nobody had yet been able to prove. But the Heshmat case is only the tip of the iceberg. After the Muslim Brotherhood successes in the first (of three) rounds of voting, the regime cracked down sharply, arresting large numbers of Brotherhood members, harrasing voters and journalists, blockading voting stations, and - yes - cheating.

- The Constitutional reforms and referendum are taking place in an atmosphere of rather intense repression of activists, bloggers, protestors, and the Muslim Brotherhood. The regime is taking no chances. I hope everyone [reads these accounts](#) of how state security goons are treating political activists, liberals and Islamists alike. I suspect that the crackdown on bloggers may have a lot to do with their successful project of "citizen monitoring" of the Parliamentary elections, where ordinary people with camera phones documented all kinds of electoral abuses to the regime's embarrassment. This time, no chances. The judges appear to be [planning to monitor the referendum](#) - we'll see if they get the chance to do so honestly.

Amnesty International has described the changes as "the biggest threat to Egyptian democracy since emergency laws passed after the assassination of President Anwar Sadat by Islamist extremists in 1981." That's exactly right. Except these aren't emergency laws: this revises the Constitution itself. I said this on Friday, but let me say it again, slowly. Mubarak is about to do exactly what he always accuses Islamists of secretly planning: win an election and then use his majority to abolish democracy.

The opposition, from the MB to Kefaya, has been placed in an impossible position. Participating in the referendum will legitimize the results, particularly since nobody doubts for an instant that the regime will falsify the results if they go badly. The most extreme option, a collective resignation from Parliament, seems to have been taken off the table: even the MB seems to feel that this would be going too far, and that this [would only please the government](#) which would be able to replace the troublesome MB deputies with more accomodating deputies. That leaves only [boycott](#), which will not in the end have much impact - as above, even if only 10% turn out and vote, the regime will happily claim 70%.

The best and only real option: mobilize sustained, critical [international media](#) attention to stigmatize and embarrass the Egyptian regime. [Al-Jazeera has been giving full voice](#) to the Egyptian opposition, but the [Saudi press](#) is mostly ignoring it, probably because the Saudis don't really like democratic reforms and they are currently comfortably aligned with Cairo and Washington against Iran. [Al-Arabiya](#) currently does not have a single front page story about the Egyptian crisis (though this may change over the course of the day, of course), while between al-Hayat and al-Sharq al-Awsat there is exactly one story, a [scathing opinion piece by Fahmy Howeydi](#), who can write whatever he wants to write because he's Fahmy Howeydi... except in Egypt, [where al-Ahram refused to run this highly critical piece in](#) his usual weekly column spot. Some Egyptian papers, like al-Masry al-Youm, are doing a good job, but it's often been noted that they have this margin of freedom precisely because of their relatively limited influence and reach.

At the end of the day, there's only one opinion which Mubarak and the NDP really care about: the United States. The Constitutional crisis has not been front page news here, and even where it has been covered, the [criticism has been tepid](#). The State Department's spokesman [took some questions about this yesterday](#). To his credit, he said that some of the changes "raised questions," and that Egypt didn't seem to be meeting its own benchmarks for reform - the

statements which al-Jazeera chose to highlight - but he went out of his way to praise Egypt's general commitment to political reform and its progress to date. He even rather absurdly suggested that a week might be plenty of time for Egypt's citizens to become fully informed and vote. But he did make sure to say the magic words for which Mubarak's people were waiting: "I frankly don't want to insert the United States Government in the middle of what should be a domestic political event in Egypt."

So there you go. The United States no longer considers Egyptian or Arab political reform to be any of its business. As long as the United States refuses to put any real teeth into international dissatisfaction, its "reservations" can be safely ignored. In response to Amnesty International, [Egypt's Foreign Minister declared](#) that "It is not the right of non-Egyptians to comment or simply pass an opinion on a purely internal question, that is, on the constitution [of Egypt] and its national laws." The United States agrees. This isn't a surprise any more, but I suppose it's good to have the clarity.

### **Lebanon: The Impasse Continues**

by Rima Abushakra

The political impasse facing Lebanon is multi-faceted and presents the United States with a pivotal and complicated challenge in its oft-conflicted quest for Arab democratization and moderation. The United States has thus far stood firmly behind the government of Fuad Siniora, as have the Arab states, Europe, and the international community with the exception of Iran and Syria. This pro-Siniora stance is not solely based on efforts to protect or promote democracy, but also upon efforts to protect Lebanese sovereignty from Iranian and Syrian infringement. Iran and Syria's main agents of wielding influence include sympathetic elements of Lebanese society and political circles, which are currently in the midst of a months-long, daunting campaign to bring down the Siniora government, which has further polarized the country, at times leading to violence. They have staged sit-ins, held huge demonstrations, held a general strike, shutting down roads and continue to threaten more "civil disobedience". Underlying these efforts is the goal of protecting Syria from the formation of an international tribunal that will try the perpetrators of the Hariri assassination and the string of political assassinations that followed.

Backing for the Siniora government is based on two pillars. Most importantly, the government was legitimately elected within the proper institutional framework of Lebanese democracy and remains legitimate under its constitution. Secondly, the events that are taking place on the ground cannot realistically be extracted from Iranian and Syrian interests in Lebanon, which are respectively allowing Hizbollah to maintain its weapons arsenal and blocking the international tribunal to protect those responsible for the Hariri assassination. Syria and Iran find it both convenient and strategic to use Lebanon as a battlefield in their stand-offs with Israel.

The opposition does have support among a large percentage of the Lebanese people. However many feel this support has waned given the length of the campaign, its harmful impacts on the Lebanese economy, and the overt acts of violence associated with the latest protests. On the day the opposition announced a general strike, 103 people were injured, 3-12 people died (depending on whose estimates you believe), roads were blocked with burning tires, and people on their way to work were pelted with rocks. That day is now known as 'Black Tuesday'.

Interestingly, the opposition claims that they are protecting "democracy". Firstly, they claim that they represent the majority, so they should rule. Secondly, they claim that their campaign has been "democratic" in its implementation. Seeing through this haze of contestable political rhetoric points to an essential element that the United States may be overlooking in its efforts in the region: people do not understand the concept of democracy or rather democracy is seen here in simplistic terms of non-violence and freedom, free from being grounded in an institutional framework and rule of law which upholds it and protects its citizens' rights.

What is worrying is that the Bush administration might also be working with a similar simplistic concept of democracy. While the Lebanese seem to see democracy as a majority ruling over a minority, the Bush administration places much emphasis on elections, as we saw in Iraq. However, what both the Lebanese and Iraqi predicaments show us, is that without strong institutions and a just, transparent system people believe in, instability will prevail, because governance becomes a struggle of the survival of the fittest.

Not enough emphasis has been placed on the fact that Lebanon's opposition has succeeded in essentially paralyzing the country's institutions. For example, the Speaker of Parliament is an ally of the opposition, and thus refuses to call for an extraordinary session of parliament, despite petitions signed by a majority of the members of parliament and despite the precarious security situation the country is facing. He also claims that he will not convene the Parliament during regular sessions. The Parliament is considered to be the most appropriate venue for the resolution of disagreements, rather than the streets. The President is also an ally of the opposition and thus has also been presenting obstacles to regular day to day affairs of government. For example, most Lebanese embassies at the moment are being headed by the chiefs of missions, as the President has been postponing signing approvals of ambassadorial appointments, in spite of the fact that they had been mutually agreed upon by him and the Prime Minister.

The fact that the country's institutions and democratic process are being undermined has serious implications for its future stability. In standing behind the Siniora government, it would seem that the U.S. is doing the right thing in terms of supporting democracy in Lebanon. However, while the U.S. might be doing just that, its rhetoric has been too heavily focused on accusing Syria and Iran of destabilizing the country. While this is not inaccurate, the rhetoric would be more effective if it were framed in the way that the U.S. is actually protecting Lebanese democracy from internal and external threats. The U.S. does support programs that increase transparency in Lebanese governance, but could also develop programs that promote the understanding of and faith in transparent, democratic, institutional processes. The institutional paralysis Lebanon is now facing is not just the fault of the opposition, but points to the many shortcomings of the country's democratic and institutional framework, which require reform.

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