



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

As the past week marked the final days of the George W. Bush administration, some commentators took stock of the foreign policy during his eight-year tenure, while others looked ahead to the administration of incoming President Barack Obama. Also, Hillary Clinton and Susan Rice both appeared in confirmation hearings before the Senate. In the Middle East, a tentative ceasefire is now being observed by both sides of the recent Gaza conflict, while restrictions on human rights in Egypt and Tunisia were discussed, and the release of a political prisoner in Saudi Arabia was noted. Discussion this week will likely be dominated by today's inauguration of President Obama, with further confirmation hearings for new administration appointees continuing on Thursday.

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

January 20, 2009

Legislation

On Tuesday (1/13), [S.229](#), sponsored by **Senator Barbara Boxer** (D-CA), a bill to empower women in Afghanistan, was introduced and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

On Tuesday (1/13), [S.230](#), sponsored by **Senator Barbara Boxer** (D-CA), the **International Women's Freedom Act of 2009**, which expresses U.S. Foreign policy with respect to individuals persecuted and denied their rights in foreign countries on account of gender, was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations. The bill aims to strengthen U.S. advocacy on behalf of such individuals. On Friday (1/16), **Rep. Carolyn Maloney** (D-NY), introduced [H.Res.606](#), the House version of the bill, which was referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

On Thursday, (1/15), [H.Res.66](#), sponsored by **Rep. Dennis Kucinich** (D-OH),

expressing the Sense of the House of Representatives concerning the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bill calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and for the resumption of unrestricted humanitarian access.

On Thursday, (1/15), [H.Res.72](#), sponsored by **Rep. Barbara Lee** (D-CA), was referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bill expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that the recent Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the U.S. and Iraq not legally binding on the U.S. unless approved by Congress as per the U.S. Constitution. The bill calls for 111th Congress to conduct hearings to decide whether to authorize funding for the agreement or reject it.

On Thursday, (1/15), [H.Res.578](#), sponsored by **Rep. Alcee Hastings** (D-FL), was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bill aims to address the impending humanitarian crisis of internally displaced Iraqis by increasing directed accountable assistance to the refugees and their host countries and facilitating their resettlement.

Committee Hearings

On Tuesday (1/13), the **Senate Foreign Relations Committee** met for the nomination hearing of **Secretary of State-Designate Hillary Clinton**. The full text of statements by [Clinton](#), Committee Chairman [John Kerry](#) (D-MA), and Ranking Member [Richard Lugar](#) (R-IN) are available, as well as [video](#) of the confirmation hearing. Clinton expressed a commitment to strengthening civil society in Iraq and removing troops as outlined under SOFA, focusing greater attention on increasing stability and the rule of law in Afghanistan, pursuing all diplomatic tools in dealing with Iran, and reaching a sustainable solution between Israel and Palestine. For POMED's full notes on the hearing [click here](#).

On Thursday (1/15), the **Senate Foreign Relations Committee** also met for the nomination hearing of U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Designate Susan Rice. Again, the committee has made available the full text of statements by [Susan Rice](#), Committee Chairman [John Kerry](#) (D-MA), and Ranking Member [Richard Lugar](#) (R-IN).

In Washington

Presidential Appointees: There was much discussion last week of the various Cabinet appointees of **President-elect Barack Obama**. [10 experts posed questions](#) they would like **Secretary of State-designate Clinton** to answer at her confirmation hearing, while another analyst offered a [short roundup](#) of how the hearing was received in the Middle East media. Some commentators [pointed](#) to the [disappointing lack](#) of Arab and Iranian Americans in Obama's new Middle East advisory circle. Others were more optimistic, [highlighting](#) comments indicating "a clean break" with the Bush administration Middle East policy. On the subject of Iran, Clinton said the [new administration would move quickly](#) on direct engagement. A [report noted](#) that "what we might see is the beginning of considerably lower-level diplomatic engagement..."

Meanwhile, the *NYT* also [asked](#) five legal experts to pose questions they would like to

hear **Attorney General nominee Eric Holder** answer. Many questions centered on torture, rights of detainees, and other issues related to the United States' own human rights record. Also, some had [questions](#) for the nominated U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, **Susan E. Rice**, reflecting concerns over a need for U.N. reform and a reevaluation of U.S. relations with the organization. Others took stock of the outgoing administration's [failures](#) in promoting democracy, and how the 'freedom agenda' was [undermined](#) by the U.S. approach to international law.

Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran: One commentator offered some words of wisdom on the new administration's Middle East approach. [Iraq](#) he suggested implementing "a coherent counterinsurgency transition from coalition to Iraqi security forces" before U.S. troop withdrawal. This strategy should also incorporate a [role for both the Iraqi government and the Iraqi public](#) centered on "supporting a political agenda that focuses on national reconciliation efforts." Regarding [Afghanistan](#), newly elected **Rep. Tom Perriello** (D-VA) said a "serious accountability offensive" is required to address the "huge legitimacy gap" and "toxic political environment."

Additionally, **British Foreign Secretary David Miliband** [offered](#) his opinion on the "war on terror" saying the idea "gave the impression of a unified, transnational enemy" and cautioned that this serves to "play into the hands of those seeking to unify groups with little in common." **Jaap de Hoop Scheffer**, Secretary General of NATO, gave a number of [recommendations](#) for moving forward in Afghanistan. Others [called for](#) U.S. engagement with Iran to have "democratic substance," including regular contacts and solidarity with Iranian civil society.

What to do about Hamas? POMED's **Shadi Hamid** [offered](#) some suggestions on how to deal with Hamas. Meanwhile other commentators noted that the recent crisis may have actually [strengthened](#) Hamas' rule in Gaza, or [examined](#) the U.S. role in engineering the elections that brought Hamas to power, stating "[a] million and a half Palestinians are learning the hard way that democracy isn't so good if you vote the wrong way." Another analyst [addressed](#) the UK report that Obama is planning "low-level" contact with Hamas, arguing that establishing relations with Hamas is tantamount to rewarding bad behavior. Some experts [stressed the need](#) for Obama's first order of business "to put in place a sustainable cease-fire," while others focused on steps needed [beyond the ceasefire](#).

Fostering Mutual Understanding: Islamic and social science scholars from Egypt and Saudi Arabia are [currently touring the U.S.](#) to engage in discussions with students, policy makers, and community and faith leaders on the role of faith in our societies. The delegation has stressed the existence of a moderate majority in the Muslim world and calls for justice and equality in U.S.-Muslim relations. On another note, **John Shattuck** (former Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the State Department) will [soon take on the role](#) of president of Central European University in Hungary. He plans to create an "international school of public policy" that fosters "a more sophisticated understanding of democratic development and of open society" that recognizes that there is "no blueprint" for open societies and every case is country specific.

Also Worth Reading

An [interesting op-ed](#) by **Marc Plattner** of the National Endowment for Democracy focused on whether the appeal of market-based democratic rule will be undermined

by the current global economic recession. Will the world's authoritarian rulers get a boost from the fallout of capitalism's excesses? Plattner argues not, as the financial crisis has affected all nations regardless of governing ideology, and mature democracies are much better positioned to withstand steep swings in income levels and unemployment. "Democracy has often displayed a remarkable ability to reform and renew itself. This gives it a resilience that may prove decisive in the competition with its more brittle authoritarian challengers."

In the Middle East

The Future of Democracy in Iraq: There were two differing examples this week pointing to the long road ahead for Iraq's experiment in democracy. One [study](#) reported on the status of the country's upcoming provincial elections, in which four provinces, including Kirkuk will not take part. Conversely, the [southern province](#) of Muthanna, the first to be returned to Iraqi control, was lauded as "an example of Iraq's future" by **Ambassador Ryan Crocker**.

Human Rights in Egypt: Some analysts discussed the [rollback in political freedom and human rights in Egypt](#) since the height of the so-called "Arab spring" in 2005. As Bush's calls for democratic reforms have subsided, President Mubarak "no longer feels encumbered to feign attempts at any meaningful democratic reform." On a more positive note, women in Cairo are slowly [breaking into the traditional male-dominated mosque culture](#), now organizing their own Koran lessons, literacy classes, clothing drives, and medical clinics. Meanwhile, there is growing furor in Egypt and throughout the region over Mubarak's [decision to keep the border crossing to Gaza closed](#). A report suggested that Mubarak wants to avoid providing Hamas with an economic lifeline, as he has no interest in bolstering a group with ideological ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Propaganda in Tunisia: One report this week stated that [Tunisia may be the world leader](#) when it comes to using state-aligned media to slander, discredit, and silence domestic forces of democracy and human rights. Tunisia's disinformation campaigns against critics "now spread to the planting of news, adverts and paid-for editorials in foreign papers as well as the local press."

Human Rights Activist Released from Prison in Saudi Arabia: Back in November we discussed the [unprecedented public hunger strike](#) in Saudi Arabia in protest of the illegal detention of 12 Saudi democracy and human rights activists. On January 10, after 8 months in jail without charge, prominent political dissident **Matrouq al-Faleh** [was released](#). He is the fourth prisoner to be set free since the hunger strike, and prison conditions are reported to have improved for those still being detained.

Also Worth Reading

Freedom House has [released its annual survey](#) for 2009 on the state of global political rights and civil liberties. This year, Iraq is the only MENA country to register a gain, due to the decrease in political violence and militia activity. Four countries in the region declined in the ratings: Jordan (greater restrictions on freedom of

expression), Bahrain (freedom of expression and Shi'a persecution), Iran (repression of political opposition and media), and the Palestinian Authority (various Hamas and Fatah malfeasance). The report notes that as MENA was the centerpiece of the Bush administration's freedom agenda, the region's appalling reform record represents a particular failure for the U.S. Israel is the only country listed as "Free", with Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, and Kuwait "Partly Free." All others are "Not Free."

Here's the [overview essay](#) (MENA starts on page 8). **Michael Allen** at *Democracy Digest* also has a [good summary](#) of the report.

In Case You Missed It

On Monday (1/12) POMED, in conjunction with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, hosted a forum for foreign policy experts to discuss how President Obama should move forward in the Middle East. The discussion was based on POMED's [recent publication](#): "Speaking Clearly: What Should President Obama Say to the Middle East?" Participants included **Michele Dunne**, **Scott Carpenter**, **Hisham Melham**, and **Heather Hurlburt**, with **Andrew Albertson** moderating. For POMED's full notes on the discussion, [click here](#).

On Wednesday (1/14) the Century Foundation, along with the Center for Social Policy and Understanding held a discussion focusing on ways the U.S. can foster democratic reforms in the Middle East and restore its stature in the Arab world. Panelists, including **Saleh Al-Mani**, **Abou Elele Mady**, and **Manar El Shorbagy**, stressed the importance of boosting civil society through NGOs and the importance of U.S. neutrality in the development of democratic political parties. [Click here](#) for POMED's notes on the event.