



Last week the House Appropriations Committee held its markup of the Fiscal Year 2009 emergency supplemental bill. In addition to funding for operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the bill also includes supplementary foreign assistance for Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt. Also, the Obama administration released several documents providing greater detail on its budget request for FY2010, which includes a significant increase for the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), and the Near East Regional Democracy (NERD) Fund. In addition, there was a fascinating House Human Rights Commission hearing on human rights in Egypt, in which Ayman Nour, political activist and former presidential candidate who was recently released from prison, made a surprise appearance, giving testimony live by telephone from Egypt. This week, the full House is expected to vote on the FY09 supplemental, while the Senate Appropriations Committee will also consider the bill.

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 11, 2009

Legislation

On Wednesday (5/6), [H.R.2278](#), sponsored by Rep. **Gus Bilirakis** (R-FL), a bill which would direct the President to provide Congress with a report on anti-American incitement to violence in the Middle East, was referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bill cites *al-Manar*, *al-Aqsa*, and *al-Zawra* television stations as ones which "broadcast incitement to violence against the United States and...aid Foreign Terrorist Organizations in the key functions of recruitment, fundraising and propaganda." The bill would designate such providers 'Specially Designated Global Terrorists' and consider punitive measures against them.

On Thursday (5/7), [S.Res.49](#), sponsored by Senator **Richard Lugar** (R-IN), a bill which would express the sense of the Senate regarding the importance of public diplomacy, was placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders. The bill cites the negative view of the United States abroad and Freedom House's figure that 123 countries have a press classified as "Not Free" as reasons for a reexamination of the public diplomacy platform strategy of the United States. Specifically, the bill recommends establishing American cultural centers "in societies in which freedom of speech, freedom of the press, or local investment in education [are] minimal."

Congressional Hearings

On Tuesday (5/5), the House Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing on the future of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. The hearing, titled "From Strategy to Implementation: The Future of the U.S.-Pakistan Relationship", focused predominantly on the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement (PEACE) Act, which proposes to increase civilian aid to Pakistan. The hearing was divided into two panels of witnesses. The first panel featured Ambassador [Richard Holbrooke](#), Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The second panel included [Lisa Curtis](#), Senior Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, [C. Christine Fair](#), Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation, and [Daniel Markey](#), Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Chairman [Howard Berman](#) expressed Congress' concern about the "deteriorating security situation in Pakistan" and asserted that the PEACE Act would strengthen Pakistan's democratic institutions and civil society. Ambassador Holbrooke and the hearing's panel of experts all agreed that the PEACE act was necessary and called for the full cooperation of the Pakistani government. To read POMED's notes on this hearing, [click here](#).

On Thursday (5/7), the House Appropriations Committee met to consider the 2009 [supplemental bill](#) to provide funds for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, aid to Pakistan, and other purposes. Chairman **David Obey** (D-WI) said he was "extremely dubious" that the **Obama** administration's strategy in Afghanistan would succeed, but that he was willing to give them one year to try it out. For POMED's notes on the hearing, [click here](#).

Also on Thursday (5/7), the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held a hearing on the status of human rights and political reform in Egypt. Discussing these issues before the commission were **Saad Eddin Ibrahim**, Founding Chair of the Ibn Khaldun Center; **Ahmed Salah**, an activist and leader of the April 6 movement in Egypt; **Cameel Halim**, Chairman of the Coptic Assembly of America; **Paula Schriefer**, Director of Advocacy at Freedom House; and **Ayman Nour** via telephone from Egypt. The participants urged Congress to pass [H.Res.200](#), a resolution introduced by **Rep. Frank Wolf** (R-VA), which calls on "the Egyptian Government to respect human rights and freedoms of religion and expression in Egypt." For POMED's notes on the hearing [click here](#).

In Washington

Obama Announces Plans for Speech to the Muslim World: The White House announced on Friday that **President Obama** will [make his much anticipated speech to the Muslim world on June 4 in Egypt](#). Some argued that by choosing Egypt the administration has [invited comparisons with the influential 2005 speech](#) that former Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** gave in which she aggressively promoted democratic reform in the Middle East.

De-linking Aid and Human Rights in Egypt: After meeting with Egypt's President **Hosni Mubarak**, Defense Secretary **Robert Gates** declared that U.S. military assistance to Egypt would [not be tied to Egypt's record on democracy or human rights](#). As one analyst noted, "there's been much [debate and discussion](#) of how the **Obama** administration would [deal with democracy concerns](#); this reported statement by Gates would be one of the most direct and disheartening public statements yet of its [downgrading](#)." Others argued that "the Obama administration is [returning to the old U.S. policy](#) of ignoring human rights abuses by Arab dictators in exchange for their cooperation on security matters - that is, the same policy that produced the Middle East of Osama bin Laden, Hamas and Saddam Hussein."

A New Plan for Peace? Quartet envoy **Tony Blair** announced that a [new framework for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process](#) is in the works and should be released within the next five to six weeks. The Obama administration is currently devising the plan and "has portrayed a two-state solution as the only way to solve the Mideast conflict." And in the Middle East, Arab foreign ministers [met in Cairo](#) to formulate a united approach toward the peace process ahead of the **Mubarak, Abbas, and Netanyahu** visits to DC.

Meanwhile, Hamas leader **Khaled Meshal** announced his organization's [willingness to enter a ten-year truce with Israel](#) and to seek a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, and suggested that Hamas' charter (which calls for Israel's destruction) was outdated and could be ignored. White House spokesman **Robert Gibbs** [minimized](#) this development in Hamas' position, saying that the U.S. would not encourage Israel to talk with Hamas before the group met certain conditions, "including the [renunciation of terror](#), the recognition of Israel, and abiding by past agreements." And others exhibited [skepticism](#), arguing that "Meshal's gambit to dress up perpetual war as a two-state peace is yet another iteration of the Palestinian rejectionist tragedy."

Finessing the Taliban Problem: As **President Obama** [met with Presidents Zardari and Karzai](#) in Washington last week, many [urged Congress to approve emergency funding](#) to Pakistan and Afghanistan. But some argued that the U.S. is [enabling Pakistan's leaders](#) to ignore the Taliban threat by providing Islamabad with [unconditional aid](#).

It was argued that "the Taliban offensive in northern Pakistan has the [potential to become a nationwide movement](#) within a few months." Some addressed the absurdity of the U.S. having to [persuade](#) Pakistan's government to [take the Taliban insurgency seriously](#). And [many speculated](#) that Pakistan's [efforts against domestic militants](#) have been so lackluster because of [the ambivalence of the Pakistani military](#). Ensuring an effective counterinsurgency will most likely require [considerable assistance from Pakistan's neighbors](#). Another suggestion was that the U.S. might push **Zardari** and **Sharif** to [form a unity government](#) in order to more effectively confront the militant threat. Meanwhile, President **Obama** has [expressed](#) a willingness to explore negotiations with moderate tribal leaders or other fighters who can be split off from the Taliban. But there may be [resistance to such a policy](#) by some in Pakistan and especially in Afghanistan.

May Issue of Arab Reform: Be sure to check out the [latest edition](#) of the Carnegie Endowment's *Arab Reform Bulletin*. This issue includes discussion of a possible re-birth for Fatah, the odds of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood running in next year's parliamentary elections, the June presidential election in Mauritania, judicial reform in Saudi Arabia, and improving education in the UAE.

Also Worth Reading

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has published its [annual report](#). The report documents "serious abuses of freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief around the world" and recommends thirteen countries be designated as "countries of particular concern" for "egregious violations of religious freedom" including Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. It also defines a "Watch List" of countries including Afghanistan, Egypt, and Turkey, which the commission recommends be closely monitored.

In the Middle East

UAE Torture Tape Threatens Nuclear Deal: The [emergence of a video](#) showing a United Arab Emirates prince torturing an Afghan businessman has caused [widespread outrage in Congress](#) and may threaten a deal in which the U.S. would assist the UAE with civilian nuclear technology. But a spokesman for the State Department [said](#) the administration believes the two issues should be dealt with separately. The Texas businessman who first leaked the tape to the press says he has [other tapes of the prince torturing](#) at least 25 other people. While the government of the UAE initially claimed that the incident did not violate any of the country's laws, it has since announced that it will launch an investigation.

Renewing Sanctions on Syria: Some weighed in on the announcement that the Obama administration has [renewed](#) sanctions on Syria for another year. One analyst examined steps taken and rejected by Syria and the U.S. in recent talks between the two, concluding that [the renewal of sanctions shows the lack of progress in talks](#). "This is the clearest sign that negotiations between Damascus and Washington are going, if not badly, at least slowly despite statements by both sides that progress is being made."

Ending the Sponsorship System in Bahrain: Early last week, Bahraini Labor Minister **Majeed Al Allawi** [announced](#) that a new labor law would be implemented on August 1 allowing foreign workers to switch jobs without their existing employer's consent. One commentator argued that "it sounds like Bahrain is taking this step now hoping to [promote nativization in the work force](#). If guest workers gain more rights and can start improving their conditions, there will be less incentive for companies to prefer them to Bahrainis...the trick will be whether unemployed Bahrainis will accept many of the jobs traditionally done by guest workers, or whether their expectations will still exceed what guest workers would ask for."

Iran, Elections, and Human Rights: In the fight for Iran's presidential election, the candidacy of Mohsen Rezaei "is [expected to siphon away support for Ahmadinejad](#) and split hard-liners over the [economy](#), unemployment and how to negotiate with the Obama administration." Some [pointed out](#) that Rezaei has commented that he would be [willing to cooperate with the U.S.](#) on regional security issues if elected. However, "the fact that he's a wanted man on serious international terrorism charges seems likely to put a crimp in negotiations." Others examined the possibility of the formation of a [pragmatic conservative coalition ticket](#).

Meanwhile, **Delara Darabi**, a 23 year-old Iranian was executed for a crime she was alleged to have committed while still a minor. Iran is known to have executed at least 42 juvenile offenders since 1990. But what [makes this case even more significant](#) is that Darabi was hanged without her lawyer being notified and despite being given a two-month stay of execution by the Head of Judiciary. Amnesty International had [campaigned against her conviction](#) and did not consider her trial to be fair "as the courts refused to consider new evidence which the lawyer said would have proved she could not have committed the murder."

Women's Rights: As Kuwaitis prepare to vote in this month's parliamentary elections, it was reported that a politician from the Salafi movement has [publicly called for a boycott of female candidates](#).

Meanwhile, in Morocco, some analyzed the relative success of revisions to the "Moudawana" or family code which were "made in a [spirit of equity between men and women within the family unit](#), with the aim of protecting children's interests while respecting the balance between tradition and modernity in a country that is highly attached to its family-based identity." Speaking of the balance between tradition and modernity, one analyst contrasted [the differences between Western feminism and the type that is emerging in the developing world](#), arguing that the latter is more "family-centered rather than self-centered." And Turkey was [praised for its progressive policies on women's right](#), particularly its review of cultural traditions unfair to women that were wrongly attributed to hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Mohamed).

The Rise of Salafi TV in Egypt? There was an interesting article last week on the [rise of Salafi satellite television stations in Egypt](#). Many of these new stations "focus on preaching from a more puritanical perspective that does not emphasize politics," and some critics argue that "this is part of a [government] strategy to cultivate Salafism as a counterweight to the [Muslim] Brotherhood." However, the authors concluded otherwise, that the popularity of these stations reflects "a logical shift towards more puritanical interpretations of religion, across broad segments of society, in response to specific economic, cultural and political developments."

Also Worth Reading

Turkey's liberals, who initially supported the AKP when it came to power in 2002 are now abandoning the party, while neo-liberals continue to support it. In an [op-ed](#), **Soner Cagaptay**, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, argued that liberals have grown frustrated by the AKP's slow pace on economic reform, its backsliding on gender equality and press freedom, and the lack of progress on EU accession. Liberals want to reform Turkey's secular Kemalist heritage by making it less authoritarian and no longer believe the AKP will promote that goal. Neo-liberals, by contrast, support the AKP precisely because they think it will put an end to Kemalism, particularly its nationalism and its European-style secularism, which strictly separates religion from government and education.

In Case You Missed It

On Monday (5/4), Voices for a Democratic Egypt and the Middle East Studies Program at SAIS hosted a panel with **Saad Eddin Ibrahim**, Visiting Professor at Harvard and Founder of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies; **Michele Dunne**, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment and Editor of the *Arab Reform Bulletin*; **Wa'el Abbas**, prominent Egyptian blogger; and **Joshua Muravchik**, Foreign Policy Institute Fellow at SAIS. The discussion was focused on the democratic movement in Egypt along with Obama's new approach to the Middle East. For POMED's notes on this event [click here](#).

On Tuesday (5/5), the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy hosted its 10th annual conference with this year's focus on ways of strengthening the relationship between the U.S. and Muslim world. There were over fifteen panelists, hailing from both the United States and abroad and six keynote speakers that included **John Esposito**, Maldivian Foreign Minister **Ahmed Shaheed**, **Shibley Telhami**, Congressman **Keith Ellison**, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs **Madelyn Spirnak**, and **Saad Eddin Ibrahim**. For POMED's notes on this event [click here](#).