



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week was the first week of 2008 in which both the House and the Senate were in session, with the Senate convening on Tuesday and immediately passing a revised version of the Defense Authorization bill for FY08. On Wednesday, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released its annual "Budget and Economic Outlook" report and the Director of the CBO testified before House and Senate committees. In the Middle East, several hundred thousand Palestinians flooded from Gaza into the Egyptian Sinai after large sections of the border wall were destroyed Tuesday evening. This week will begin with President Bush's final State of the Union address at 9 pm tonight, while foreign affairs will largely take a backseat to domestic concerns and an economic stimulus package on Capitol Hill this week.

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 28, 2008

## *Legislation*

On Tuesday, [H.R.4986](#), the **National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008**, was passed by the Senate in a vote of [91-3](#), and presented to President Bush on Thursday. The bill is nearly identical to an earlier version of the Defense Authorization bill, [H.R.1585](#), passed by the House and the Senate in December but vetoed by President Bush on December 28, except that it omits a provision regarding lawsuits against countries that sponsor terrorism that the President feared could have opened the U.S. to liability lawsuits related to actions in Iraq that occurred under the rule of Saddam Hussein.

**Title XII** of the bill addresses "Matters Related to Foreign Nations," including provisions addressing the Iraqi refugee crisis, authorizing funds for military and counterterrorism training, and requiring reports on progress toward political and counterterrorism benchmarks in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. For more details on the authorization bill, see this [POMED report](#) from December.

## *Committee Hearings*

**The House Committee on Foreign Affairs** (House 1/22): **The Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia** held a [hearing](#) entitled, "That which is not obligatory is prohibited: Censorship and Incitement in the Arab World." The hearing focused on the various progress, or lack thereof, of the freedom of the press across the region. [Joel Campagna](#) of Committee to Protect Journalists, [Richard Eisendorf](#) of Freedom House, and [Kenneth Jacobson](#) of the Anti-Defamation League testified at the hearing. Subcommittee Chairman Rep. [Gary Ackerman](#) (D-NY) presided over the hearing. For full POMED notes on the hearing, [click here](#).

**The House Committee on Foreign Affairs** (House 1/23): **The Subcommittee on International Organization, Human Rights, and Oversight** and **Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia** held a [hearing](#) entitled "The Proposed U.S. Security Commitment to Iraq: What will be It and Should It Be a Treaty?" The panel consisted of [Kenneth Katzman](#), Specialist in Middle East Affairs for Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division of the Congressional Research Service, [Michael J. Matheson](#), visiting Research Professor of Law at George Washington University Law School, and [Michael Rubin](#), Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and Senior Lecturer at the Center for Civil Military Relations, Naval Postgraduate School. The Honorable Rep. [Bill Delahunt](#) (D-MA) and Honorable [Gary Ackerman](#) (D-NY) presided over the hearing.

**The House Budget Committee** (House 1/23): held a [hearing](#) entitled "The Congressional Budget Office's Budget and Economic Outlook." The witness was [Dr. Peter Orszag](#), Director of the Congressional Budget office.

**The House Appropriations Committee** (House 1/23): **Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee** held a hearing entitled "Foreign Assistance: Proposals for Reform". Witnesses included **Mary Bush**, former Chairman, HELP Commission, **Leo Hindrey**, former Vice Chairman, HELP Commission, **Lael Brainard**, Vice President and Director, Global Economy and Development, Brookings Institute, and **George Rupp**, CEO and President, International Rescue Committee; CSIS Commission on Smart Power. For full POMED notes on hearing, [click here](#).

## *In Washington*

**President Bush's Policies Toward Iran:** One commentator faulted President Bush for incorrectly assessing Arab's concerns about Iran, stating that by focusing on the nuclear threat, the [United States fails to acknowledge Iran's contribution to militancy across the region](#). Meanwhile, others in Washington [ponder the allocation of more than half of the \\$60 million](#) appropriated for FY08 to State Department programs designed to "promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Iran."

**Fervent Debate on U.S. Foreign Policy:** While some [continued to question the U.S. arms deal with Saudi Arabia](#), accusing **President Bush** of willfully ignoring Saudi involvement in activity aimed against the United States, others continued to keep close watch of Lebanon's presidential crisis, worrying that the [possible victory for Hezbollah and in turn Iran would essentially be a defeat for the U.S.](#) In commemoration of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** last week, one analyst held up Dr. King's use of [peaceful means to create change](#) as an example to those who wish to achieve success in American foreign policy.

**The Long-haul for Iraq:** Some evaluated the [effects of the "troop surge,"](#) others examined the successes and failures of programs to [support local democratic development in Iraq](#), while others worried that the different Iraqi sects and ethnicities are "making their political decisions without a fear of costing more innocent lives," concluding that rather than withdrawal, now is the time for the U.S. ["to stay in to get it right."](#)

**Questioning Bush Administration Support of Musharraf** Some observers [compared](#) "risky" U.S. support of Pakistani President Musharraf to that of the Shah of Iran and [deplored the possibility](#) of a situation comparable to the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Others in Washington [worry about "the radicalization of Pakistan's youth"](#) and that it seems to mirror a trend across the Islamic world, begging the question as to why America has "done precious little to arrest this trend."

**Islam, the Middle East, and the 2008 Candidates:** Many analyzed **Mitt Romney's** statements last week on what [he viewed as the underlying causes of instability in the Middle East](#), and how he might [address problems in the region as president](#). In [analyzing the campaign rhetoric](#) of all candidates thus far, one observer [decried the frequent use of the word "Islamofascism,"](#) arguing that it is not only a politically expedient term that denigrates Islam, but that it also demonstrates a worrisome misunderstanding of modern political and religious dynamics in the Middle East and how the U.S. should assert itself within them.

### *In the Middle East*

**Gaza Crisis, Hamas, and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt:** In the context of last week's crisis in Gaza, some [examined](#) the ramifications for the internal political scene in Egypt, noting particularly that "In Egypt, as elsewhere, all politics is ultimately local, and one serious problem for Mubarak is the link between the Brotherhood and Hamas." Others [analyzed the implications](#) of the recent production of a party platform by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.

**Iranian Internal Politics and Censorship Concerns:** Many were quick to analyze the reasoning behind **Khamanei's** [recent snub](#) of Iranian President **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**, and asked "whether it should be considered [a serious blow or more of an election maneuver](#) on the part of the current speaker of the parliament, **Gholamali Haddad Adel**. In a preview of Iran's March parliament election, where approximately 40 percent of candidates are characterized as "having a record" and thus most likely will not be allowed to run, some noted that this election "could [give President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad more political challenges](#)." Others are [concerned about the death "under suspicious](#)

[circumstances](#)” of **Ebrahim Lotfallahi**, an Iranian student of Kurdish descent who was detained by the Ministry of Intelligence on January 6.

**Women, Politics, and Rights in the Gulf: Nouria al-Subeih**, Kuwait’s Minister of Education and Higher Education and only female politician, has [survived a vote](#) to remove her from office despite accusations of “mismanagement and endangering traditional religious values. In response to [last week’s decision by the Saudi Ministry of Trade](#) on allowing women to stay in a hotel or furnished apartment without a male guardian, and the prospect of lifting the ban on women drivers, one analyst was quick to say that “[some credit should go to King Abdullah](#),” who, in the Saudi context, “count[s] as a reformer.”

**Afghanistan and Its Many Problems:** An analyst [discussed the repercussions of people living in dangerous parts of Afghanistan](#) who have no option but to turn to the Taliban for protection, thus taking away their possibility of cooperating with other actors for fear of retaliation. Others highlighted that [Afghanistan’s problems cannot be tackled without taking its regionalism into account](#) and identifying ways to address it. Some [questioned the justice](#) behind the possibility of jailed journalism student **Sayad Parwez Kambaksh** to be [punished by death for “humiliating Islam”](#) because of bringing an interesting paper to his class.

**Musharraf, Pakistan, and the Military:** Many last week [highlighted the high stakes](#) dependent on the role of the new Pakistani army Chief of Staff **General Ashfaq Kiyani**, while others continued to worry that **President Pervez Musharraf’s** [political career is in dire straits](#), especially considering the dissatisfaction of [the majority of Pakistani people](#) with him. Meanwhile, the Pakistani intelligence service, ISI, who has supported a number of militant Islamic groups, is [now in a dangerous position](#) because some of these growing groups have now cut off relations and are performing attacks against the Pakistani government.

**Criticism of Stalled Lebanese Elections:** Arab League Secretary General **Amr Moussa** expressed his [dissatisfaction](#) with the political workings in Lebanon in the midst of the presidential crisis. Some criticized the [ineffectiveness of the Arab League efforts](#), they [credited Syria for manipulating the president election](#).

**Continued Debate on Iraqi Attempts at Re-Baathification:** The recently passed de-Baathification law is causing much [controversy](#) in Iraq and there is much distrust towards the de-Baathification commission. While many [called the new legislation a “disappointment](#) and even [a sham](#),” others [voiced their support](#) for it. Meanwhile, some heralded [new progress](#) in Iraq, particularly the solidification of a Sunni-Shiite coalition.

#### *Also Worth Reading*

In an [examination of the 2007 Moroccan parliamentary elections](#), **Michael McFaul** and **Tamara Cofman Wittes** highlight the three “most interesting” results: “when given the chance to vote in free and fair elections, Moroccans did not sweep Islamists into power, even though polls and analysts had predicted such an outcome,” the demonstration of clear differences between Islamist parties across the Middle East, and that, “limited reform has a limited shelf life.”