

Arab Reform Bulletin

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Insights and Analysis

The Value of Postponing Iraqi Elections

By Raad Alkadiri

The U.S. push for elections in Iraq by January 31, 2005 is motivated not just by a desire to meet a prominent deadline on the post-war transition calendar. Many senior U.S. officials also see elections as a crucial palliative to the country's chronic instability. Underlying this view is the belief that Iraq's Shiite and Kurdish communities are guaranteed to participate in the vote, and that the emerging government will therefore enjoy the support of at least 75 percent of the Iraqi population, giving it the broadest legitimacy of any administration in Iraq's modern history and allowing it to make tough policy decisions. Moreover, Washington expects that Iraq's two traditionally disenfranchised communities finally will enjoy political representation proportional to their population size.

However, U.S. logic is flawed. Rushing into elections on the basis of this view could actually exacerbate instability in Iraq, not reduce it. The most obvious problem is that U.S. officials continue to view Iraqi politics through the narrow prism of sectarianism and ethnicity. They remain wedded to the notion that Iraq is an amalgam of three basically monolithic communities—Shiite, Sunni, and Kurd—and that sectarianism and ethnicity will determine voting patterns. Washington's closest Iraqi allies, the former exile parties that dominated the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) and that now dominate the interim government, have pushed this view.

But U.S. officials rarely, if ever, question how representative these parties—and the agendas they espouse—really are. Opinion polls taken over the past year suggest that outside of the Kurdish north, where the two large Kurdish parties enjoy a broad following, only the Shiite Dawa party could claim a significant constituency. A recent poll conducted by the Iraqi Center for Research and Strategic Studies suggested that while Iraqis are generally supportive of elections, more than 40 percent of respondents believe that the absence of "real" political parties will impede the process.

Indeed, there is arguably a large plurality—if not a majority—of the Iraqi Arab electorate that remains secular and nationalist in political orientation and that opposes the sectarian and ethnic agendas of the large parties, but that has no effective public voice. Without political vehicles to represent the views of these Iraqis, there is a real danger that they will opt out of the election altogether—meaning that it may not be only Sunnis who abstain from the process.

This is a troubling scenario. For a newly elected government to enjoy genuine legitimacy, all Iraqis will need to feel that they have a stake in it. However, an election that appears simply to reinforce the dominance of the former IGC parties—which could happen if elections take place before new parties have time to organize and if Washington continues to engineer the success of its former IGC allies—would lead to the opposite effect. The boycott of August's Iraqi National Conference by nationalists and Islamist Sunnis offered a worrying precedent in this regard. Moreover, it suggested that these groups felt their

agendas would be better served by seeking to derail what they regarded as an illegitimate transition rather than by using the process to pursue their political goals.

Even a boycott limited to Islamist Sunnis and nationalists would be dangerous. Some U.S. officials hold a misguided notion that the threat posed by these groups can be contained so long as the Shiite and Kurdish communities are on board with the transition process, and ultimately that the Sunni-nationalist rejectionists (and the insurgency) will be subsumed by the rising tide of democracy and by overwhelming U.S. military force. But this view misses the point: if long-term stability in Iraq is the goal, the political transition will need support from all of Iraq's diverse constituencies. After all, the political success of the single-national-constituency proportional representation system—the system that the United Nations and the United States have chosen for Iraq—is founded on the expectation that all Iraq's groups will vote.

More important, the elected transitional government's main task is to write a permanent constitution that will define the political framework for a new Iraq and the rights of its people. If a significant portion of the population is alienated from the drafting process, it is unlikely to accept the eventual document as legitimate. Arguing that boycotting groups forfeit their role in the process and only have themselves to blame is of limited value. In practical terms, such exclusion dooms Iraq to continued violence and instability, especially if the boycott extends beyond the Sunni triangle.

Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's government and parts of the international community clearly recognize this danger, and are engaged in initiatives to win support for elections from Islamist Sunni and nationalist representatives. In many ways, the fate of the transition in Iraq—and the government's ability to dampen the insurgency—rests on the success of these efforts. The greatest number of Iraqis need to be brought on board, even if this means delaying elections temporarily and reassessing policies such as de-Baathification and the disbanding of the army in order to do so. Otherwise, the elections will simply serve to heighten the sense of disenfranchisement that many Iraqis have felt since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, creating a dangerous thorn in the side of successive Iraqi administrations whose legitimacy they will contest.

Raad Alkadiri is Director of the Markets and Countries Group at PFC Energy in Washington, DC. He spent ten months in Baghdad as the Policy Adviser and Assistant Private Secretary to the United Kingdom Special Representatives to Iraq, Sir Jeremy Greenstock and David Richmond. The views expressed here are strictly his own.

After Arafat: A View from Gaza

By Mkhaimar Abusada

Even murkier than the cause of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's death is the question of who will fill the gaping political hole left by his passing. True to his penchant for avoiding definitive decisions, Arafat did not name a successor. Immediately after the pronouncement of Arafat's death on November 11, it was left to the senior Palestinian

leadership—the executive committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the central committee of Fatah (the largest PLO faction and the Palestinian Authority's ruling party), and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)—to form a temporary leadership that will rule until elections take place.

The old guard has assumed the positions previously held concurrently by Arafat. Mahmoud Abbas (commonly known as "Abu Mazen"), the co-founder of Fatah and the Secretary-General of the PLO, will succeed Arafat as PLO Chairman. Ahmed Qurie, a member of Fatah's central committee, will chair the National Security Council, on which the leaders of the Palestinian Authority's ten security services sit. Selected as the Secretary-General of Fatah's central committee was Farouq Qaddumi, who opposed the 1993 Oslo Accords and remains in exile in Tunisia. At the urging of the committee, which insisted that the leadership transition must adhere to the rule of law and which also sought to dilute Abbas's power, PLC Speaker Rawhi Fattouh was designated interim President of the PA. (Palestinian law stipulates that in the event of the President's death, illness, or resignation, the PLC speaker assumes his duties for sixty days until elections are held). Qurie will also continue as Prime Minister, a position he has held since October 2003.

Fattouh is somewhat obscure and has weak nationalist credentials, and Qaddumi lives abroad. Therefore, Abbas and Qurie will call the shots in the transitional period. Abbas is the leading candidate to succeed Arafat as President, as he now heads the PLO, the most important institution in Palestinian politics. Abbas, the architect of the Oslo Accords, served as prime minister for four months in 2003 but resigned after losing a power struggle with Arafat. Although he gained a modicum of popular support due to his calls for the reform of Palestinian institutions and his outspoken criticism of the militarization of the Intifada, Abbas lacks charisma or strong backing within Fatah, and is viewed with skepticism for his moderate attitudes toward Israel. To establish a power base, Abbas would need to ally with Muhammad Dahlan, the former head of the Gaza Preventive Security Force and Minister of Security Affairs in Abbas' government. Dahlan is influential in Gaza and has a power base within the security forces and within the Tanzim, the military arm of Fatah.

Qurie is a less likely successor. A long-time ally of Arafat, he was the key negotiator in the secret talks that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords. Like Abbas, he is short on charisma and popular support. During his tenure as prime minister, the security situation and living conditions in Palestine have only deteriorated.

Even if Abbas or Qurie were elected, the source of their legitimacy is their past closeness to Arafat and their seniority within the PLO, not their street credibility. Given this fact and the extreme political fragmentation and weakening of institutions that has occurred during the four-year Intifada, the post-Arafat period may witness the birth of a genuine parliamentary system in which multiple factions share in governing. Such a scenario would coincide with the national unity leadership that Egypt has already been pushing for Gaza after the anticipated Israeli withdrawal in 2005. Hamas in particular will demand a leading role in governance. Not only does Hamas now present itself as a partner rather than a competitor of the PA—its latest slogan is “partners in blood are partners in decision-

making”—it has made clear it will no longer tolerate an autocratic style of governance. Yet, even under such collective governance, armed factions— Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the security services and militias that have proliferated in the Palestinian Territories— may confront the PA as well as one another.

No matter who succeeds Arafat, in the near-term two things are certain. First, the daunting socioeconomic problems facing Palestinian society will be beyond the capacity of any new leadership to resolve quickly. The economy is in deep crisis: unemployment exceeds 50 percent and 70 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza live below the poverty line.

Second, predictions that Arafat’s death will bring a quick end to the cycle of violence between Palestinians and Israelis are overly optimistic. The immediate post-Arafat era could see efforts to revive negotiations stymied by a paralyzed Palestinian decision-making structure—the likely cost of collective leadership. More important, the Israeli government is mistaken if it believes that Abbas or Qurie (or any other new leader) will be able to reach a peace agreement and deliver security for Israelis on terms less than what Arafat demanded. The period ahead might prove that Arafat, with all his failings, was Israel’s best choice to bring peace and security and put an end to the conflict, because he had the legitimacy to do so.

Mkhaimar Abusada teaches political science at Al Azhar University in the Gaza Strip.

The Sad State of Political Reform in Tunisia

By John P. Entelis

To the surprise of no one, on October 24 Tunisians turned out in record numbers—91.5 percent of the country's 4.6 million eligible voters—to re-elect President Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali to a fourth consecutive five-year term. Voters also gave his ruling party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD-Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique), an overwhelming victory in parliamentary elections held on the same day.

The election results were essentially predetermined when Ben Ali pushed through a constitutional amendment, approved in a landslide referendum in May 2002, that eliminated the three-term limit for presidents. Intentionally or not, Ben Ali seems to be following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Habib Bourguiba, whom he overthrew in a "constitutional coup" on November 7, 1987, partially in response to Bourguiba's self-designation as "president for life."

The early optimism that the post-Bourguiba era would see the arrival of political pluralism, if not democracy, has been all but extinguished in the last fifteen years as the president and his ruling party have dominated the political scene while eradicating all sources of opposition, secular and religious. To be sure, the regime has been enormously successful in pursuing progressive social policies pertaining to women's rights and in advancing economic development—nearly 70 percent of Tunisian households own their own homes

and the country's gross national product (GNP) per capita tops \$3,500. But this success has simply added to the discontinuity that defines the Tunisian paradox in which enhanced material well-being coexists alongside a robust political authoritarianism.

In part to offset a negative political profile among actual and potential foreign allies and investors, the regime has contrived a carefully crafted but thoroughly transparent pseudo-democracy predicated on controlled political pluralism and predetermined electoral outcomes. The October 2004 elections are the most recent manifestation of this political ploy.

Determined to solidify his "democratic" credentials among his own people and his supporters in Europe and the United States, Ben Ali permitted three non-threatening candidates to contest his re-election, as compared to two competitors in 1999 and none in 1989 and 1994. Of these challengers, only Muhammad Ali Halouani, head of the Ettajdid Party (ex-Communist) and representative of a bloc of independent politicians running under the "Democratic Initiative" label, publicly decried the results after obtaining just 0.95 percent of the vote. Muhammad Bouchiha, Secretary-General of the Popular Unity Party (PUP-Parti de l'Unité Populaire), who also happens to be related to Ben Ali's wife, received 3.78 percent while Mounir Béji of the Liberal Social Party (PSL-Parti Social Libéral) obtained 0.79 percent.

None of these government-approved candidates have a significant political following nor do any challenge the President's personality or policies. In the view of regime supporters, Ben Ali's "modest" 94.48 percent victory, down from his previous highs of 99.7 percent, 99.6 percent, and 99.4 percent in 1989, 1994, and 1999 respectively, highlights the "contested" nature of the presidential election.

The outcome of the parliamentary election paralleled that of the presidency. The Constitution mandates that four-fifths of the legislature's seats be reserved for the ruling party while the remaining 20 percent are contested by the country's seven officially-sanctioned opposition parties. Thus, of the total 189 seats in the unicameral Parliament, the RCD won 152, and the remaining thirty-seven seats were distributed among the Social Democratic Movement (MDS-Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes), the PUP, the Unionist Democratic Union (UDU-Union Démocratique Unioniste), Ettajdid, and the PSL.

The ruling party is especially proud of its commitment to ensure that at least 25 percent of its candidates are women. RCD women won thirty-nine seats, compared to twenty in the previous Parliament. Overall, forty-three of the 189 newly elected deputies are women, one of the highest proportions in the world. Unfortunately for both male and female legislators, however, the chamber of deputies plays a marginal political role and its influence over national policy is negligible.

None of the opposition parties represented in Parliament challenge the regime's hegemony or the absolute power of the presidency. The "real" opposition is banned, imprisoned, or harassed. It includes the still popular Islamist party, Al Nahda, headed by Rachid Ghannouchi, who lives in self-imposed exile in London. Modernist and secular figures

representing a broad spectrum of political tendencies from liberal democrats (Moncef Marzouki) to communists (Hamma Hammami) to progressive socialists (Nejib Chebbi) have all decried the blatantly manipulative character of the political process. Outspoken journalists, human rights activists, academics, lawyers and other public personalities have joined them in condemning the oppressive nature of political life where the media is tightly controlled, the Internet monitored, and freedom of political expression all but banned. Marzouki's description of Ben Ali's three-pronged policy accurately reflects the way this leader is perceived by these and other democratically inclined groups: "To remain indefinitely in power, to remain indefinitely in power, to remain indefinitely in power."

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Parliaments in the Gulf Monarchies: A Long Way from Democracy

By Michael Herb

In recent years, elections for national parliaments have become common in the monarchies of the Gulf. The Kingdom of Bahrain, the emirate of Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman have held such elections in the past two years, and the emirate of Qatar has plans to do so in 2005. Much has been made of these elections, with many observers championing the participation of women, who are now enfranchised in all but Kuwait. Yet, to understand the prospects for democratic change in these dynastic states, attention should also be paid to two other pertinent issues—the quality of elections and the constitutional rules that define the parliaments' powers.

Gulf elections are much fairer than those organized by most authoritarian regimes. The Kuwaiti government blatantly stole the 1967 contest, but since then has not interfered in the counting of ballots. Despite ongoing incidents of vote-buying and notwithstanding the fact that women still cannot vote or run for office, Kuwait's elections compare well to those of many emerging democracies. In Bahrain, the balloting is fair but the districts are drawn in a way that seriously under-represents the country's majority Shiite population. In Oman, significant constraints are placed on campaigning, but otherwise the process is relatively open. Indeed, it is the very fairness of Gulf elections that leads the rulers to balance their effects by imposing substantial constitutional constraints on parliaments.

Two key powers are required for parliaments to wrest absolute control from monarchs and to thus democratize the state: the power to remove ministers and the power to block legislation. The authority of the Kuwaiti Parliament is the most substantial in both respects. Kuwait's Constitution gives its unicameral Parliament the power to remove individual ministers with a majority vote of the elected members. (All ministers, including those who gained their posts through appointment rather than election, are allowed to vote on legislation, but not on votes of confidence). As a consequence, the ruling family takes parliamentary attitudes into account when forming the cabinet, giving the Parliament a veto of sorts. In Bahrain, the elected Lower House can dismiss individual ministers, but only with a vote of two-thirds of the deputies. Qatar's new constitution establishes a

unicameral Parliament. Of the forty-five members, Qatari citizens will elect thirty; the Amir will appoint the remaining fifteen. The Parliament can remove a minister only with a two-thirds majority. Assuming the appointed members vote with the government, all elected members must vote against a minister to remove him—a high barrier indeed. However, this is more power than the Omani *majlis al shura*, the elected Lower House, enjoys. The Sultanate's Basic Law gives the assembly no powers, merely noting that they will be specified by law. The ultimate authority to issue laws, of course, lies with the Sultan.

Gulf parliaments also have limited ability to block legislation. Again, Kuwait's powers are the most substantial on this front. Even with ministers being able to vote on laws—which typically adds up to fifteen wholly reliable votes in the government's column—the Parliament has successfully blocked some legislation. Most notable was the defeat of a government effort to extend political rights to women, which failed in a thirty to thirty-two vote in 1999, with the government voting as a bloc for women's rights. The Parliament has also blocked efforts to develop the northern oil fields.

Bahrain's Parliament has fewer powers to block legislation. Should the Lower House and Upper House disagree on a bill, the two houses vote together, with a majority required to pass legislation. The appointed Upper House has the same number of members as the Lower House. Consequently, it is very difficult for the elected deputies to frustrate the will of the appointed members, who tend to side with the government. In Qatar, the unicameral house can block legislation with a simple majority, but this amounts to twenty-three of the thirty elected members, which is a high hurdle. Oman's *majlis*, again, has no powers at all in this regard.

In short, with the exception of Kuwait, these parliaments have only modest powers. Any progress toward democracy in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar will require constitutional revisions to expand parliamentary powers while maintaining a tradition of relatively free elections. In Kuwait, the Parliament already has the power to mount a very serious challenge to the primacy of the ruling family—it could simply vote no confidence in every minister until the ruling family surrendered and allowed the Parliament to select the cabinet itself. There is no prospect of this occurring anytime soon, but it suggests that the barriers to democratization in Kuwait, unlike elsewhere in the Gulf, do not lie primarily in its constitution.

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News and Views

Voter Registration Begins in Iraq

Amid ongoing violence, the process of registering Iraq's estimated 14 million voters for the January 2005 national elections began on November 1. Citing the political and logistical challenges of conducting a national census, the Iraqi Electoral Commission (IEC) chose instead to create a registry from Iraq's food rationing database (previously used for the UN oil-for-food program and now overseen by the Iraqi Ministry of Trade). Iraqis can register by visiting any of 40,000 food agents across the country. When they receive their annual ration card, they are asked to confirm the names of their voting-age family members. To make any corrections or additions to the registry, they would then need to visit one of the 542 food registration centers in Iraq.

The IEC's hope is that linking voter registration to the popular rationing system—some 40 percent of Iraqis still depend on rations—will provide a protective cover for those who fear being targeted by insurgents opposed to elections. Critics of the plan charge that the ration lists are inaccurate because Saddam Hussein's government had excluded numerous Iraqis from the lists for political reasons. So far, only 85 percent of the registration centers are operating; security concerns have kept centers in Mosul, Ramadi, Falluja, and other locations shut.

After months of debate, the IEC announced in a controversial decision on November 4 that it will allow voting-age Iraqis in other countries—estimated at between one and two million people—to vote. The Commission has yet to determine the procedures for, or locations of, out-of-country voting.

Also spurring controversy is the process of registration for party lists and individual candidates, which is taking place concurrently with voter registration. According to strict conditions set by the IEC, based in part on the March 2004 Transition Administrative Law (TAL) drafted under the former U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), candidates must possess at least a secondary school diploma, have a "good reputation," and not have been convicted of a crime involving "moral turpitude." Anyone who held the rank of division member or higher in the Baath Party is also ineligible to run for office.

A New Leader for the Emirates

Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan, who served as President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since the Gulf state's 1971 independence from Great Britain, died on November 2 at age eighty-six. Two days later, the Supreme Federal Council, which is composed of the leaders of the seven emirates that make up the UAE, unanimously chose Zayed's eldest son, fifty-six-year-old Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as his successor.

In a cabinet reshuffle just days before Sheikh Zayed's passing, Lubna Al Qasimi was appointed the UAE's first female minister. She serves as Minister of Economy, Commerce and Planning, the first woman in any Arab country to hold such a portfolio.

Tensions on the Rise in Bahrain

Bahraini authorities are further clamping down on political activity in the wake of the September 25 arrest of Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, director of the now-defunct Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR). Al Khawaja had criticized Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa Al Khalifa for human rights abuses and for the country's economic problems. Al Khawaja, who argued during a court appearance that the National Security Laws of the 1976 Penal Code are unconstitutional, was reportedly beaten in prison. After thirty people were arrested on October 28 during protests against Al Khawaja's imprisonment, a rumor spread that the government is preparing to introduce a harsh new anti-demonstration law.

In addition, according to letters sent by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, more than eighty of Bahrain's 360 registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) face forced closure by early 2005. The letters, dated July 26, 2004 but only recently made public, accuse organizations lacking permanent headquarters and failing to convene an annual general assembly of violating the 1989 Associations Law and warn of "prompt measures" if they do not comply within six months. According to Nabil Rajab, President of the BCHR, many NGOs do not have sufficient funding to establish headquarters.

Observers are concerned that if not managed properly, these tensions could escalate into an outbreak of political and socioeconomic conflict between the majority Shiite population and the minority ruling Sunnis. Shiites complain that they are excluded from positions of power. Unemployment—officially estimated at 15 percent although it is probably higher—is concentrated in the Shiite community. Al Khawaja and most of the protestors are Shiite. Bahrain experienced chronic unrest from the late 1970s to the 1990s, but saw tensions ease considerably after reform-minded King Hamad Bin Issa Al Khalifa came to power in 1999.

New Party Legalized in Egypt

After three rejections, Egypt's Political Parties Affairs Committee (PPAC) finally granted legal recognition to the opposition Al Ghad ("Tomorrow") Party on October 27. The PPAC has approved only two other parties since its 1977 establishment. Al Ghad's platform calls for political reforms including direct presidential elections and endorses a neo-liberal economic agenda. Its Secretary-General is Mona Makram Ebeid, a former member of parliament and the first woman to head a political party in Egypt.

Egyptian Opposition Journalist Attacked

Abdul Halim Qandil, one of Egypt's most outspoken opposition journalists and editor of the Nasserist weekly *Al Arabi*, was kidnapped, beaten and left naked on the Suez Desert Road on November 2. Qandil claimed that four armed men told him that he was being punished for talking about "important men." Although the identity of the culprits is unknown, according to some reports Qandil blamed Interior Minister Habib Al Adli in a complaint sent to the Prosecutor-General. The pages of *Al Arabi* feature relentless criticism of President Hosni Mubarak, condemning his plans to serve a fifth, uncontested term and the prospect of his son, Gamal, inheriting power.

Jordan Puts Political Reforms on the Back Burner?

Jordan reshuffled its cabinet on October 24, the eleventh cabinet change since King Abdullah ascended the throne in February 1999. The reshuffle signals the government's new priority of administrative reform to streamline the bureaucracy. This supercedes the political reform agenda which was the declared focus of the previous cabinet but saw little concrete action. To carry out his goal of reducing the size of the state, King Abdullah has created seven ministerial posts, bringing the total number of ministers to twenty-eight. (New positions include Minister for Government Performance, held by former foreign minister Marwan Muasher, and Minister for Public Reforms). Prime Minister Faisal Al Fayez told members of Parliament that the government is not abandoning political reforms but rather pursuing them through a "multi-track plan" of economic and administrative changes, as well as election, political party, and media reforms.

In another development, the latest reform manifesto to emerge from the Arab world was issued last month in Jordan. Signed by 116 Jordanians of diverse political orientation, profession, and residence, the "Amman Declaration for Reform" criticizes Arab governments for a lack of follow-through on reform and for excluding the public from the process. It offers recommendations to transform reform from being the task of rulers and bureaucracies into a political challenge for the masses. To read the Declaration in Arabic, click [here](#).

Women's Rights on the Agenda in Kuwait

In Kuwait, a government-sponsored bill that would grant women suffrage and the right to run for office headlines the new session of Parliament, which opened on October 26. The Kuwaiti leadership has been vocal in support of the legislation. Reading a statement on behalf of the Emir, Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah, Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah declared that "Kuwaiti women should be able to vote and stand in elections as candidates. They have been equal partners with Kuwaiti men and have shouldered their responsibility." The influential Energy Minister has also stumped for the bill, which has the clear support of fifteen members of the fifty-seat Parliament, as well as

a portion of the fifteen-member cabinet (ministers have the right to cast votes on such matters). The bill needs thirty-three votes to pass. The Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), Kuwait's main Islamist group and an affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, has indicated its approval of the legislation, although a recent poll of the ICM rank-and-file revealed that the overwhelming majority opposes allowing women to run for office. Parliament voted down women's rights legislation twice in 1999.

Also pending in the current session is a bill to reduce the number of electoral districts from twenty-five to ten (which supporters claim will curb rampant vote-buying), a proposal to expand Parliament to sixty members and the cabinet to twenty ministers, and an Islamist-backed initiative to amend Article 2 of the Constitution to make *Sharia* "the source" instead of "a source" of Kuwaiti law.

Government Change in Lebanon

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri resigned on October 20 amid an ongoing political and diplomatic crisis over Syria's influence in Lebanon's affairs that had paralyzed the government for weeks. At Syria's behest, the Lebanese Parliament voted on September 3 to amend the Constitution to extend pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud's term by three years. Hariri, locked in a bitter rivalry with Lahoud for years, had initially opposed the amendment but later changed his stance under pressure from Damascus. Rising U.S. and French concerns about Syrian interference in Lebanon led to the passage in September of UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the withdrawal of "all foreign forces" from Lebanon and for a "free and fair electoral process" without foreign interference. Syria maintains some 15,000 troops in Lebanon.

After heading five governments between 1992 and 2004, Hariri has been replaced by former prime minister Omar Karami, who formed a thirty-minister, pro-Syrian cabinet on October 26. The cabinet excludes opposition members and Hariri's parliamentary bloc. For the first time in Lebanon's history, two women were given ministerial posts: Leila Solh, daughter of former prime minister Riad Solh and Wafaa Hamza, a Shiite close to Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri.

Morocco Considers New Party Law

In Morocco, the Ministry of Interior and political parties are negotiating a political party reform bill that may be introduced by the end of November. According to the Ministry, the legislation would improve parties' internal management, make it easier for them to receive public funding, and diversify their membership by establishing quotas for women and youth. Detractors are concerned about provisions that would ban religious, racial, regional, socio-professional, or linguistic references in party platforms. If enacted, such prohibitions could jeopardize the status of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), Morocco's sole legal Islamist party, as well as that of Berber parties.

Report Criticizes Morocco's Human Rights Record

In a sign of Morocco's increasingly open press, a new Human Rights Watch [report](#) critical of the Kingdom received wide publicity in the Moroccan media following its October 21 release. The report, "Human Rights at a Crossroads," warns that counter-terror legislation passed in the wake of the May 2003 Casablanca bombings risks reversing Morocco's considerable progress in human rights. The report calls on Moroccan courts to act as a bulwark against abuse in the government's persecution of suspected Islamist militants by rejecting evidence that is tainted by torture or other coercion and by holding the perpetrators of such abuse accountable. Human Rights Watch praises Morocco's new [Equity and Reconciliation Commission](#) as the Arab world's most serious effort yet to address past human rights abuses, but is concerned about the Commission's limited mandate and powers.

Views from the Arab Press on the U.S. Election, Post-Arafat Palestine, and Falluja

U.S. President George W. Bush's reelection prompted diverse reactions in the Arab press. A November 5 [editorial](#) in Jordan's pro-government daily *Al Dustour* expresses optimism about the election results. It argues that Bush will be less beholden to special-interest groups in his second and final term, allowing him to adopt a more balanced Middle East policy. By contrast, a November 9 [editorial](#) in Saudi Arabia's *Al Watan* insists that President Bush will deepen the divide he has created between the United States and the Arab world and will "allow Israel to divide Palestine into isolated defenseless cantons." Abdul Bari Al Atwan, editor of London-based pan-Arab daily *Al Quds Al Arabi*, predicts in a November 4 [opinion piece](#) that Bush's clear victory will entrench the U.S. President's conviction that the United States should engage with the Arab world through aggression instead of through dialogue.

Ali Hamada assesses Arab regimes' reactions to the elections in a November 4 commentary from *Al Nahar*, the largest-circulation Lebanese daily. He writes that on the one hand, the Saudi government is pleased with the results because Senator John F. Kerry had threatened to break ties with Saudi Arabia; Jordan's King Abdullah is looking forward to continuing his close relations with the Bush administration; and the interim Iraqi government is relieved to avoid having to deal with a change of command. On the other hand, the Egyptian government is critical of Bush's handling of the Palestinian issue and objects to his vision of Middle East "freedom," and the Syrian regime is worried that Bush will exert more pressure on Damascus to decrease its role in Lebanon.

Writing in Egypt's leading government-owned daily *Al Ahrām* on November 4, Ahmed Al Bari finds fault with the immense attention paid by the Arab world to the American election, arguing that the results are irrelevant because all American presidents and administrations share unconditional support for Israel and an unfavorable policy toward Arab countries. President Bush won the election by pursuing a policy of fear, contends

Amira Al Shanwani in a November 4 article in the same newspaper. Bush instilled in American citizens deep concern about their security, which was exacerbated by the Osama Bin Laden tape released shortly before the vote. In a November 9 [analysis](#) in the United Arab Emirates' *Al Khaleej*, Adnan Al Sayyid Hussein criticizes Arab-Americans for not playing an active role in the U.S. elections. He contends that political changes favoring Arabs will not take place so long as Arabs lack an effective electoral strategy and do not have a significant lobby inside the United States.

The death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the question of who will succeed him has also spurred strong reactions among Arab commentators. Palestinian analyst Riad Al Malki, writing in the semi-official Palestinian daily *Al Ayyam* on November 9, [condemns](#) Palestinian officials' policy of secrecy about Arafat's hospitalization and argues that Palestinians have a right to know the details of their leader's situation. The emerging power struggle within the Palestinian leadership is shameful but not unexpected, explains Ahmed Al Rabi in a November 9 [article](#) in London-based pan-Arab *Ash-Sharq Al Awsat*. Arafat's legacy of one-man rule and lack of transparency prevented the emergence of functioning political institutions. Conversely, Hassan Khudor, writing in *Al Ayyam* on November 9, [claims](#) that a post-Arafat power struggle is unlikely, and that the leadership transition will be much smoother than most media reports have suggested.

The new U.S.-led assault on the Iraqi city of Falluja is also a point of focus in Arab press commentary. In a November 7 op-ed [article](#) in London-based pan-Arab *Al Hayat*, Ghassan Sharbel argues that the attack is symbolic of all the factors currently at play in Iraq: resistance to the occupation, Sunni opposition to elections that will further diminish their power, and the presence of foreign insurgents. Thus, the fate of Falluja will determine the broader fate of Iraq, the January elections, and the image of the United States in Iraq and the entire Middle East. Leading Islamist commentator Fahmi Howeidi laments the Arab silence over the attack on Falluja in a November 10 article in *Ash-Sharq Al Awsat*. Howeidi accuses Arab governments and societies for participating in the "crime" through their apparent indifference toward it.

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Read On

Three new publications explore the challenge of democratic development in particular areas of the Middle East. As international attention is focused on national elections in Iraq, a new [report](#) by the International Crisis Group (ICG) calls for strengthening local governance by holding rolling elections in Iraq's eighteen governorates, by expanding the powers of local councils, and by improving communication between Baghdad and the hinterland ("Iraq: Can Local Governance Save Central Government?," ICG Middle East Report no. 33, October 27, 2004).

In his new article "[The Future of Palestine](#)," Khalil Shikaki contends that holding elections in the Gaza Strip before Israel's 2005 withdrawal from that territory may be the only way

to avoid chaos and to establish the foundations of a democratic Palestinian state and more peaceful Israeli-Palestinian relations (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2004, 45-61).

A Freedom House [report](#) finds that political and social progress for women in Egypt remains impeded by a closed political system, inadequate public education, and a population largely disengaged from political life ("Women's Rights in Focus: Egypt," Freedom House's Survey of Women's Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa, October 19, 2004).

Amy Hawthorne's new [Carnegie Paper](#), "Arab Political Reform: A New Ferment?," analyzes the region's burgeoning post-September 11 reform debate and the quite modest reforms that Arab governments have carried out in the past three years. She asserts that the political reform agenda is still tightly controlled by regimes that seek to burnish their image in the West and buy time at home, but do not feel under immediate pressure to concede any real powers (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Series, Carnegie Paper no. 52, October 2004).

Other writings address the question of the compatibility of Islam, Islamists, and democracy. Alfred C. Stepan and Graeme Robertson argue in their article, "[Arab, Not Muslim, Exceptionalism](#)," that factors particular to the Arab world—not to Islam—hinder democratic development in the region (*Journal of Democracy*, vol. 15, no. 4, October 2004, 140-46). Sanford Lakoff contends that for democracy to take hold in Muslim-majority states, Islamic beliefs must be reconciled with a social system in which individual freedom and social and political pluralism are accepted ("The Reality of Muslim Exceptionalism," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 15, no. 4, October 2004, 133-39). Claire Heristchi contests the view that political Islam is an inherently anti-democratic force. Drawing on the case of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front Party (FIS), which was poised to win the 1992 elections until the military cancelled the vote, she concludes that the democratic credentials of Islamist parties are not necessarily any weaker than those of the regimes they seek to replace ("The Islamist Discourse of the FIS and the Democratic Experiment in Algeria," *Democratization*, vol. 11, no. 4, August 2004, 111-32).

Two publications examine the relationship between Arab militaries and political change. Steven A. Cook explains how the militaries of Egypt and Syria benefit from, and thus seek to perpetuate, authoritarian political systems ("[The Unspoken Power: Civil-Military Relations and the Prospects for Reform](#)," Brookings Institution Analysis Paper no. 7, September 2004). He suggests that the United States craft policies that offer these militaries incentives to embrace democratic reform, or that at least make it harder for them to stymie it. John Tures contends that the newer Arab leaders, such as Syria's Bashar Al Assad or Morocco's King Muhammad VI, might engage in a limited show of force to target rival governments, but appear reluctant to drag their countries into full-scale war ("Will New Blood in the Leadership Produce New Blood on the Battlefield? The Impact of Regime Changes on Middle East Military Rivalries," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 58, no. 4, Fall 2004, 612-35).

Other recent writings question the presumed linkage between economic and political reform. A new [Carnegie Paper](#) by Eva Bellin argues that the often-unproductive economic policies of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East are vital to the political logic of those regimes and that any hoped-for linkage between economic reform and democratization is likely to be tenuous at best ("The Political Economic Conundrum: The Affinity of Political and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Series, Carnegie Paper no. 53, November 2004). In his new book, *Doing Business in the Middle East: Politics and Economic Crisis in Jordan and Kuwait*, Pete W. Moore concludes that unleashing the Arab private sector is not necessarily the path to economic growth or to more liberal politics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Rather, he contends that successful economic development in Arab countries is contingent on breaking the cozy relationship between state authority and the business elite.

Two Arabic-language journals offer analysis of Middle East reform. The latest issue of *Al Demokratiyya* ("Democracy"), published by Egypt's Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, features a selection of writings on Islam and globalization and an article titled "America and the Choice of Democracy in Egypt" (*Al Demokratiyya*, vol. 4, no. 14, April 2004). *Qadaya Alamiyya* ("Global Issues"), a new bimonthly published by *Ash-Sharq Al Awsat*, includes articles on the state of affairs in Iraq by Faleh Abdul Jabbar, Fawaz Gerges, and Graham Fuller and commentaries on political reform in Egypt by Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Abd Al Monem Said, and Ammar Ali Hassan (*Qadaya Alamiyya*, vol. 1, no. 1, November/December 2004).

Finally, the U.S. role in promoting democratic change in the region is the focus of several new publications. Burhan Ghalioun argues that U.S. democracy promotion efforts will produce intensely anti-Western Arab regimes unless the United States replaces what Arab societies perceive as an American plan to dominate the region with a policy of genuine strategic cooperation ("The Persistence of Arab Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 15, no. 4, October 2004, 126-32).

A collection of essays by Robert Satloff recommends that America's public diplomacy priority should not be to promote Middle East democracy *per se*, but rather to help non- and anti-Islamist Muslims defeat the Islamist challenge even if this involves allying with Muslim forces that resent aspects of U.S. foreign policy (*The Battle of Ideas in the War on Terror: Essays on U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Middle East*, Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004).

Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers challenge principles of conventional wisdom in "Middle East Democracy: Think Again," writing that Arab democrats are not necessarily the key to reform, that promoting the rights of Arab women is not crucial for democratic change, and that Middle East democracy is not the cure for Islamist terrorism (*Foreign Policy*, November/December 2004, 22-28).

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