

Arab Reform Bulletin

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Insights and Analysis

Lebanon's Crisis and Electoral Politics

Michael Young

The current crisis in Lebanon, ignited by the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, is rooted not only in opposition to the Syrian military presence, but also in frustration at the lack of presidential or parliamentary elections since 2000.

Syria has manipulated the democratic process since 1992, when Lebanon carried out its first postwar parliamentary elections. As imperfect as Lebanese elections were until then, they always garnered legitimacy from their periodicity. Under Syrian influence, however, electoral predictability became a luxury. In 1995, the Syrians tagged three years onto President Elias Hrawi's mandate. In August 2004, Syrian President Bashar Al Asad coerced Hariri and most Lebanese parliamentarians into amending the Lebanese Constitution to extend the mandate of the unpopular President Emile Lahoud. Parliamentary elections originally scheduled for 2004 were delayed a year because Syrian authorities feared that two elections in one year—presidential and parliamentary—would be destabilizing. As Damascus would have it, neither election was held.

To understand how these events affected the Lebanese, one should recall that even during the 1975 to 1990 civil war Lebanese presidents were elected. The absence of a consensus among Lebanese political forces on a presidential candidate in 1988 precipitated a crisis that soon developed into full-scale war between Syria and a section of the Lebanese army commanded by General Michel Aoun. While the conflict went beyond a deferred election, it highlighted how much the Lebanese system can be destabilized when institutional continuity and an alternation of power are abandoned.

The parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2005 are now part of a larger struggle centering on ending Syria's military presence. Hizbollah's show of strength through a massive rally and the reinstatement of pro-Syria Prime Minister Omar Karami demonstrate that Syria still has cards to play. Pro-government and opposition politicians within the Lebanese elite are carrying out this struggle partly in arguments over institutional legitimacy. The opposition has no faith that the present Lebanese regime, backed by Syria and the intelligence services, will allow a free and fair electoral process.

The opposition has demanded that a neutral government oversee the elections, partly due to concerns over the government's draft electoral law. The law calls for voting at the level of a mini district called a qada. The general outline of the law was agreed in a deal between Lahoud and the head of the Maronite Church Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir, who would benefit because voting by qada tends to guarantee votes for Christian candidates (a minority in larger electoral districts). What disturbs the opposition is that the draft law would carve up Beirut into a number of mini districts—gerrymandering originally designed to cut into Hariri's electoral power. In addition, the electoral law includes purposefully vague campaigning regulations that the opposition fears will be used to invalidate electoral victories on ambiguous grounds.

The law has yet to be passed by Parliament; in fact, it has not even been discussed by the relevant committees yet. In the present context, given the absence of a cabinet and the mounting pressure on Lahoud, parliamentary consideration of the law may be delayed. In addition, the opposition is reluctant to move forward on any legislative action until an independent investigation into Hariri's assassination takes place.

At the same time, however, the opposition must weigh its reluctance against the fact that free elections in Lebanon are a priority for the international community, particularly the United States and France. Therefore, while the opposition has sought to improve the environment for elections by undermining the ability of Syria and Lahoud to shape the outcome, it has also tried to avoid a situation where it might be blamed for an indefinite electoral delay. It is uncertain how long the opposition can keep up this tightrope walk. At some point, opposition groups will have to decide whether to advance their cause through elections under the present circumstances or to focus on other means of reducing Syrian influence. Indeed, Syria's effort to delay its withdrawal from Beirut and the Bekaa Valley for many weeks suggests it seeks to put in place a compliant parliament before it withdraws its forces from the country.

Syria's adversaries will also have to factor into their calculations the proposal made by U.S. Secretary of State Rice on March 1 to send international observers to the parliamentary elections. While such an action would buttress the opposition, it also decreases its maneuverability to delay elections.

The complexity and volatility of the Lebanese imbroglio make predictions about the timing and conditions of elections difficult. The central matter at hand is a Syrian withdrawal, and both Lebanese and external actors must remain focused on how an electoral process might advance that eventuality. Meanwhile, the Lebanese await a chance to vote in what will surely be the most significant elections since the end of the civil war.

Michael Young is opinion editor of The Daily Star newspaper in Lebanon and a contributing editor at Reason magazine in the United States.

Egypt: Opening the Constitutional Debate

Issandr El Amrani

On February 26, speaking at a rally with university students in his hometown of Menufiya, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak announced that he would ask Parliament to amend the constitution to allow for direct election of the president with multiple candidates. "I took the reins of this initiative in order to start a new era on the path of reform," Mubarak said. Since he became president in 1981 after the assassination of Anwar Al Sadat, Mubarak has been reelected four times through the referendum system laid out in Article 76 of the Egyptian constitution. Under this system, Parliament endorses with a two-thirds majority a single candidate, who then must be approved by a majority in a yes/no popular referendum. Mubarak has always won with at least 95 percent of votes.

The announcement was certainly a public relations coup. Local television channels carried live coverage of the event throughout the day, showing footage of jubilant pundits and members of parliament. For several days, the local and international press buzzed about the psychological barrier that Egypt's president had broken. Observers such as the eminent political scientist Osama Al Ghazali Harb, a member of the reformist coterie around presidential scion Gamal Mubarak, even spoke of the beginnings of a "second Egyptian Republic."

Mubarak's announcement was a surprise to all—even high-level officials seem to have had no forewarning—for several reasons. For the past month, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) had been conducting a "National Dialogue" with Egypt's main opposition parties. Although opposition parties such as the Nasserists, Tagammu, and Wafd had raised the issue of constitutional reform, NDP officials had repeatedly and publicly rejected the idea of amending the Constitution until after the presidential referendum and parliamentary elections in fall 2005. Mubarak himself had told journalists in late January that any attempt to amend the Constitution was "futile."

So why the change of heart? A rare conjunction of foreign and domestic pressures played an important role. The immediate context of Mubarak's announcement was U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's public condemnation of the arrest of Ayman Nour, the leader of the recently created Al Ghad (Tomorrow) party. Furthermore, on February 21 President Bush reiterated his call (made on several occasions since November 2003) for reforms saying, "The great and proud nation of Egypt, which showed the way toward peace in the Middle East, can now show the way toward democracy in the Middle East."

On the domestic scene, Mubarak had been facing the most vocal protests against his rule ever. Beginning with a small demonstration near Cairo's High Court on December 11, 2004, two groups led by opposition and civil society activists—Kefaya (Enough) and the Popular Committee for Change—have called for constitutional reform and campaigned against Mubarak's reelection or the inheritance of power by his son Gamal. Though small, these unprecedented protests had drawn increased participants since the Nour arrest. They also opened the way for a wider debate in the media and mainstream political circles, including inside the NDP, about the prospect of a Gamal Mubarak presidency and the issue of constitutional reform.

Mubarak's announcement has allowed his regime to seize the initiative on reform, albeit temporarily. As Galal Duweidar, editor of state-owned leading daily *Al Akhbar* wrote on the day after the announcement, "the ball is now in the Egyptian people's court."

Egyptians appear to be rising to the challenge eagerly. There are already calls for constitutional amendments and other changes well beyond allowing direct election of the president. For instance, while Mubarak's proposal requires any candidate to have the support of a certain (still undecided) number of members of parliament and local councils, the Wafd has proposed that a candidate should only need to garner signatures from 70,000 citizens, or about 1 percent of the country's population. There are also increasing calls to restore the two-term limit for presidents (removed by Sadat in 1980) as well as to redistribute certain powers from the executive to the legislative and judicial branches. Above all, the lifting of the state of emergency in place since 1981—which significantly limits civil and political liberties—still tops the demands of liberals, leftists, and Islamists alike.

Despite attempts by the pro-regime press to spin Mubarak's proposal as a revolutionary step for which Egyptians should be grateful, political groups of all shades are seizing the moment to push for more meaningful reforms. The limited constitutional amendment envisioned so far—already under discussion in parliamentary committees, and scheduled for legislative action in May—would not change the result of September's presidential elections. Assuming that the 76-year old president's health holds out, he will be returned to office. But Mubarak's move is putting wind behind the sails of a wide-ranging public debate on constitutional reform and the role of the presidency, subjects considered taboo only a short time ago.

Issandr El Amrani is a freelance journalist based in Cairo and a former editor of the Cairo Times.

Saudi Municipal Elections Raise Hopes

Rasheed Abou-Alsamh

The municipal elections currently underway in Saudi Arabia are the kingdom's first since 1963, when the last municipal races were held in the Western province. The electoral law was formulated in 1977 but never put into use due partly to the country's spectacular oil revenues, which generated unprecedented wealth and took the edge off demands for power sharing. There was an unspoken compact between the Saudi population and the rulers: leave the Al Saud rule unchallenged and they will take care of all of the citizens' needs. This compact held until the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and subsequent stationing of thousands of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia. An Islamic resurgence among Saudis, especially those who fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets in the 1980s, fueled anti-American sentiment and opposition to the royal family's decision to allow U.S. troops into the country, considered holy ground by Muslims.

For a brief moment during and just after the 1991 Gulf war, Saudis found a measure of freedom to question and demand more participation in running the country's affairs. The royal family promised that reforms would come if the population accepted the presence of U.S. troops on Saudi soil during the crisis. Yet the only reform steps that materialized were the 1992 establishment of the Shura Council (a consultative body appointed by the government to advise on legislation) and the enactment of the basic law, the kingdom's first written constitution guaranteeing basic rights.

It was not until the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, in which 15 of the 19 hijackers turned out to be Saudi, that reformists found a new opportunity to push for change. The realization that an overemphasis on religious education had produced a generation of Saudis who were rabidly anti-American, anti-royal family, intolerant, and extremist—in addition to pressure from the U.S. administration and media—forced the ruling family to admit that change was necessary. Hundreds of Saudi reformists began circulating petitions calling for reform and sending them to the ruling family. In October 2003, the government announced that elections for half the seats on municipal councils (the other half being appointed) would finally be held across the country.

The forward movement to municipal elections, however, has come with a number of backward steps as well. The March 2004 arrest of ten prominent reformists (who had been calling for Shura Council elections, a constitutional monarchy, and an independent judiciary) caused many to doubt the government's sincerity regarding reform. Seven of the reformists were released after signing undertakings not to discuss reform anymore, while the other three remain imprisoned during their trials.

In addition, so far Saudi women remain barred from participation in the elections. When the text of the electoral law was released in mid 2004, its gender-neutral language encouraged five Saudi women to declare their intent to run. By the end of November 2004, however, Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb, the head of the Higher Local Election Committee at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, announced that women would not be allowed to vote or run as candidates. Although the law did not exclude them, the justification was alleged logistical problems in staffing voting centers for women and the lack of photo ID cards among women. Women have since been

promised the vote for the next municipal elections in 2009. Saudi women's rights activists are hoping that the government will appoint some women to the municipal councils, although some were discouraged by Shura President Saleh Bin Humaid's refusal to appoint women to the Shura Council during the upcoming expansion of that body.

Municipal elections have already been held in Riyadh (February 10) and in the Eastern and Southern provinces (March 3). The Western province, which includes Mecca, Medina, Jeddah, and the Northern region, will be the last to vote on April 21. In the capital, seven Islamist candidates won all available seats on the municipal council after forming an informal alliance, a result the government was keen to avoid but unable to stop. In Qatif, the traditional stronghold of the marginalized Shiite minority in the kingdom, Shiites won all of the seats up for grabs, as well as five of six seats in the mixed Sunni-Shiite area of Al Hasa. The two rounds of municipal elections so far featured vigorous campaigning and a healthy turnout of registered voters at the polls, although voter registration was low in some areas.

Many Saudis remain deeply cynical about the powers of the partially elected councils, but this baby step towards democracy has nonetheless given hope to some that they will see elections for the Shura Council, which is currently being expanded from 120 to 150 members, during their lifetimes. They also believe that the municipal elections have opened the door to further reforms, and say it is a door the government will not be able to close again easily.

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Security Sector Reform: the Final Frontier?

Ellen Laipson

As the reform agenda for the Arab world continues to expand, it is time to integrate the issue of security sector reform into the discussion. Only in Iraq and Palestine is security reform a vibrant topic for local debate and for support or intervention by the international community. In those two cases, the debate is on because of acute shortfalls in security capacity, whether police, other law enforcement, or intelligence and military capabilities. For the rest of the Arab world, the problem may be the reverse: excess political clout and too much coercive capacity by the security professionals is leading to a mutual interest by leaders and security officials in postponing or avoiding reform.

The ground seems to be shifting now for several reasons. Virtually every Arab country is more worried about internal threats—from domestic Al Qaeda groups to civil unrest—than about external enemies. Demands to reduce defense spending and pressure from the international community to create a more secure environment for energy sector workers, diplomats, and other expatriates also contribute to the shift. Addressing these needs requires some new thinking about how best to use the security forces, including how to achieve better communication among different security services. Such integration still gives pause to many in the region, however, who deliberately developed systems of checks, balances, and mutual mistrust among security services in order to make incumbent regimes coup-proof.

There are a few signs of greater willingness to talk about the issues. In January, two nongovernmental organizations, Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies and the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, held a conference in Amman that addressed the need for security forces to disengage from their excessive involvement in the media, education, and bureaucratic appointments, and the need for more parliamentary and cabinet oversight of security institutions. Jordan may be a case ripe for change, due to its relatively stable political culture and the role of the king as an intermediary or buffer between the military and the political institutions. With his support, the debate can happen. Security issues are also more openly addressed by the burgeoning nongovernmental community in the Gulf. So far, the agenda is modest, focusing on practical improvements rather than the more theoretical issues of civilian control of defense forces and more transparent and accountable systems.

In some quiet ways, the international community is also trying to contribute. In the aftermath of the Oslo process in the early 1990s, the Arms Control and Regional Security exchanges (ACRS) provided an unprecedented venue for security professionals from across the region to meet each other and talk about issues affecting long term security. While the ACRS process, which formally ended in 1995, was not explicitly about reform, it created more space to discuss security beyond the immediate national interest of each state, established relationships across former forbidden boundaries, and strengthened civilian expertise on previously restricted military issues.

A decade later, NATO is creating new opportunities for security professionals to come out of their bunkers and talk about common concerns. First NATO offered its technical expertise to security officials in the Mediterranean, and, in June 2004, the concept was expanded to the Gulf

region and pushed from dialogue to partnership. NATO hopes to work with security communities to promote more efficient and interoperable capabilities, to encourage cooperation in defense reform, and to coordinate counter-terrorism activities. Since counter-terrorism policies can work at cross purposes with political reform (particularly with respect to privacy and freedom of expression) NATO can offer the experience of fully consolidated democracies in managing the difficult tradeoffs in combating terrorism while protecting basic freedoms, a vital goal of the reform process.

Security sector reform has clear implications for and connections to political reform. Security professionals from police to soldiers will become more competent if they are trained better, from general education to learning about the rights of their fellow citizens. Citizens need more competent security to create the environment for peaceful political participation and change; in conditions of heavy-handed, old-style security, political openness cannot flourish. Newly established or empowered parliaments need to address security issues as a core responsibility, not be told by palaces that security issues are off-bounds. And more transparency and clarity about civil-military relations and the boundaries between them are necessary conditions for political change and reform at the strategic level. Trying to promote political reform while continuing business as usual in the security sector simply will not work.

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How Democratic is Yemen?

Iris Glosemeyer

The Republic of Yemen looks relatively democratic compared to its neighbors. While Saudi Arabia is now holding local elections and smaller Gulf states have taken modest steps towards increased political participation in recent years, until now only the Kuwaiti parliament (the only such assembly in the world elected by a small male electorate) has been a force to be reckoned with. By contrast, Yemen has a multi-party Parliament, elected by voters of both sexes three times since 1993, which votes on the budget and can withdraw confidence from the government. The Republic of Yemen has had a multi-party system since it came into being in 1990, when the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) unified and their respective ruling parties tried to secure survival via political pluralism. Inspired by the global mood of change and buoyed by the long-awaited unification, Yemenis seized the opportunities that came with the introduction of new laws on the press, political parties, and a popular referendum on the constitution of the new state in the early 1990s.

Alas, the Yemeni spring did not survive its first major crisis: the struggle between the political elites of the YAR and the PDRY that had agreed to share power in the unified state. While the international community focused on Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, and kept wondering why the third wave of democracy did not reach the Arab world, the window of opportunity in Yemen began to close in winter of 1993-94. One year after the first parliamentary election, in spring 1994 the two former state leaderships went to war with each other. This disaster has had lasting repercussions, and the victorious leadership of the former YAR was left with a fear that political pluralism could result in separatism. Moreover, it is not clear whether the leadership has learned from its mistakes or actually believes its own propaganda that everything that went wrong in the early 1990s was the fault of the Yemeni Socialist Party. More than a decade later, the government still overreacts when journalists violate one of the many taboos or are suspected of “threatening national unity.”

Thus, steps towards democracy are shaky, and while popular participation has been part of daily political life for a long time, such participation is not necessarily peaceful. Violent struggles between the government and radical Islamists opposing the foreign policy of the government occur on a regular basis, frequently drawing one of the many Yemeni tribes into the conflict. The most recent fighting resulted in the death of hundreds of people in Sada province in summer 2004. The next crisis, probably a short-lived one, is already looming as protests against the lift of fuel subsidies are to be expected. Other factors could have more long lasting effects, such as a reported U.S. plan to transfer Yemeni detainees from Guantanamo Bay to a U.S.-controlled prison on Yemeni soil—a move sure to provoke Islamists and nationalists alike as well as discredit the Yemeni human rights minister (the only woman in the cabinet). Tensions created by such a move would put the government on the defensive and increase its desire to keep control by all means.

This would first and foremost affect the press and the estimated 6,000 registered nongovernmental organizations. Many of these NGOs are inactive, many confine their activities

to social welfare programs, others turn out to be governmental non governmental organizations (GONGOs) on closer inspection, and still others should more properly be called profit-oriented one-person enterprises. Nevertheless, hundreds of NGOs are engaged in serious civil society work, such as human rights training, election observation, women and youth empowerment programs, and critical academic studies.

Yemeni leaders and citizens are now challenged to ride the next democratic wave, which should bring more transparency in the public and private sectors and more freedom of the press. This time, Yemenis are encouraged by international attention to any glimmer of democracy in the Arab world and especially on the Arabian Peninsula, of which Yemenis make up roughly half the citizens. If Yemen could be removed from its regional context, it could become a true democracy—of a distinctively Yemeni style—within ten years. But being part of the Middle East with all its conflicts, violence, and authoritarian traditions, and being the poorest country of the Arab world and one undergoing a structural adjustment, Yemen's future is much less certain.

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News and Views

U.S. Department of State Report on Human Rights

The U.S. Department of State released its Annual Report on Human Rights Practices on February 28, 2005. Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky affirmed that in much of the broader Middle East citizens are “increasingly conscious of the freedom deficit in the region and eager to taste the freedom and liberties that are being enjoyed elsewhere.” She also referred to recent events in Lebanon as a “Cedar Revolution that is unifying the citizens of that nation to the cause of true democracy and freedom from foreign influence.”

The introduction to the 2004 report highlights positive developments in only two Arab states: Iraq due to the elections and the improvements of women’s political rights, and Qatar due to the Amir’s approval of a new constitution with human rights provisions. For the first time, Saudi Arabia was designated as a “country of particular concern” due to severe violations of religious freedom. Other Arab countries that were subject to specific criticisms in the report’s introduction include: Sudan (due to atrocities in Darfur and restricted freedoms throughout the country), the United Arab Emirates (due to exploitation of women as prostitutes and exploitation of young men as camel jockeys), Egypt (due to the state of emergency and torture of detainees), Syria (due to widespread use of torture resulting in several deaths), and Algeria (due to restrictions on the media). Click [here](#) to read the report.

London Meeting on Palestinian Reform

The British government hosted an international conference on March 1 to discuss Palestinian political, economic, and security reform. In attendance were U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, EU Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana, European and Arab foreign ministers, representatives from the G8 countries, and representatives from the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund. One of the central initiatives of the meeting was the creation of a new U.S.-led “security group” of countries that would provide financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority as it streamlines its security services. Plans were also laid for a future donor conference, as well as a private sector business event to identify investment opportunities in Gaza and the West Bank. Click [here](#) to read the meeting’s official documents.

New Palestinian Cabinet

After a long political battle, on February 24 the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) approved a new cabinet presented by Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei. The makeup of the new cabinet reflects a compromise between Qurei and the reformist young guard within Fatah. The 24-member cabinet, which was approved by a vote of fifty-four to ten with four abstentions, is composed primarily of technocrats. Seventeen ministers have never held ministerial posts, in contrast to Qurei’s initial list, which only included four new members. Additions include two members with experience in security reform: Muhammad Dahlan as Minister of Civil Affairs

and Nasser Yousef as Interior Minister. Nasser Al Kidwa, formerly the Palestinian UN representative, is Foreign Minister. Most old guard Arafat appointees were removed, including former Minister of Civil Affairs Jamil Tarifi, Minister of Social Affairs Intisar Al Wazeer, and Interior Minister Hakam Balawi. Longtime Minister of Negotiation Saeb Erekat was excluded but retains a role as a chief negotiator with Israel. Remaining from the previous cabinet are Salam Fayad as Finance Minister and Nabil Shaath who will move from Foreign Minister to Deputy Prime Minister. For a complete list of the new cabinet, click [here](#).

Restrictive Jordanian Bill on Professional Associations

A new draft law barring professional associations from engaging in politics has pitted the Jordanian government against association members and political activists. According to Minister of Interior Samir Habashneh, the legislation would expand the scope of participation in associations, achieve a fair distribution of funds, and ensure decentralization in decision making. Detractors, however, accuse the government of attempting to undermine its critics, as professional unions tend to be dominated by Islamists and opponents of the peace treaty with Israel and U.S. policies in the region. The draft law changes electoral procedures for associations in a way that would dilute the influence of Islamist candidates and prohibit ties to association branches in the Palestinian territories. It would also create a disciplinary council to judge offenses. The Jordanian cabinet approved the draft law on March 6 and referred it to the Lower House requesting it receive urgent attention. Jordan Bar Association President Hussein Mjalli resigned in protest and a number of parliamentarians petitioned the government to withdraw the bill. The government banned a planned demonstration of professional unions against the law on March 7, deploying security forces to prevent the protest.

***Al Ghad* Newspaper Launched in Egypt**

The inaugural edition of the organ of the Al Ghad (Tomorrow) Party hit the streets of Cairo March 9. The paper was banned by Egyptian authorities following the arrest of party leader Ayman Nour in late January, and security officials reportedly tried to censor the March 9 edition but then allowed its release without changes. The paper announces Nour's hope to run in Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential election in September. Nour remains in detention, accused of forging signatures on his party's application for licensing.

Kuwait Umma Party Formed

A group of prominent Kuwaiti Islamists, including the former head of the Sunni Muslim Salafist movement Hakim Al Mtayri, announced the formation of the Umma Party on January 29. The party's declared goals are to establish an Islamic society, remove foreign troops from the Gulf region, implement Islamic law, and support political pluralism. The party filed for a permit, although political parties are banned in Kuwait and there are no constitutional provisions or regulatory laws to deal with the issue. Following recent clashes between police and militants in

Kuwait, the government is cracking down on extremists opposed to the presence of foreign troops in the region. The government imposed a travel ban on all 15 members of the Umma Party, pending a decision by the Constitutional Court on the group's legal status.

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Women's Suffrage Issue on the Table Again in Kuwait

A government-sponsored bill that would amend the electoral law to grant women suffrage and the right to run for office is once again at the center of debate in Kuwait. Although the cabinet approved the bill in May 2004, Parliament avoided discussing it until pressure from the government put it back on the agenda. Parliament met on March 7 to set a date for a special session to discuss the bill as hundreds of supporters of the bill rallied outside Parliament. The recently-formed Umma Party announced its support for women's political rights, breaking ranks with most Islamist groups. The Islamic Constitutional Movement, or Muslim Brothers, is still considering its position, as some of its leaders have publicly supported women's suffrage. The bill needs 33 of 65 votes to pass. Parliament voted down women's rights legislation twice in 1999.

Barcelona Plus

Ten years after the inauguration of the Barcelona Process, the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo), a network of research institutes, released a report on February 25 assessing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's (EMP). The report, "Barcelona Plus: Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States," finds that progress towards democracy in Arab states has fallen short of original expectations. It says that the EMP has avoided a serious discussion of democratization in the interest of political pragmatism, relied on economic liberalization to bring about political reform, and failed to address the issue of Islamist parties' participation in the process of reform.

ADVANCE Democracy Act of 2005

A bipartisan **bill** designed to boost U.S. efforts to promote democracy abroad was introduced in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate on March 2. Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Joe Lieberman (D-CT) are introducing the "Advance Democratic Values, Address Nondemocratic Countries and Enhance Democracy Act of 2005" (ADVANCE) in the Senate; and Representatives Frank Wolf (R-VA) and Tom Lantos (D-CA) are introducing it in the House. The bill, which proclaims that the promotion of democracy, freedom, and fundamental rights is an essential element of U.S. foreign policy, seeks to strengthen the U.S. ability to promote democracy in a number of ways. It would establish a new office of Democracy Movements and Transitions at the U.S. Department of State and separate regional democracy hubs at several embassies abroad. The bill would also create a democracy promotion advisory board to provide outside expertise to the government, authorize \$250 million in increased

funding for democracy promotion over two years, require an annual report on democracy to include action plans to promote democracy in nondemocratic countries, and provide training and incentives for State Department personnel in the promotion of democracy.

Upcoming Events

- League of Arab States summit, March 22, Algiers
- Saudi Municipal Elections, final of three rounds April 21 in Mecca, Medina, Qasim, Al Jawf, Northern border region, Tabuk, Hail
- Palestinian municipal elections (third round), April 28, districts to be determined
- Lebanese parliamentary elections, May (exact date to be determined)

Views from the Arab Media

Arab satellite TV networks featured live debates about fast-breaking events in the region on their regular talk shows.

A February 22 **episode** of “Taht Al Daw” (Under the Spotlight), a weekly political debate show presented by Mhannad Al Khateeb on *Al Arabiyya*, discussed the political crisis in Lebanon. Lebanese MP Ali Hasan Khalil, Sobhi Ghandour, director of the Arab-American Dialogue Center in Washington, and Jamil Mruwwe, editor of the Lebanese *Daily Star* agreed that the opposition movement in Lebanon is not united which may pose problems for future stability. On the subject of Hizbollah’s reactions to the situation, Jamil Mruwwe observed that Hizbollah has positioned itself as the only viable force to facilitate a transition out of the crisis.

“Al Ittijah Al Mu‘akis” (The Opposite Direction), presented by Faisal Al Qasem on the Qatar-based Arab satellite TV network *Al Jazeera*, pitted Abdul Razeq Eid, a Syrian civil society activist, against Kareem Al Shibani, a government official. On the live **broadcast** on March 1, the participants disagreed over the state of internal politics in Syria, which Abdul Razeq Eid described as one of internal stagnation.

On another *Al Jazeera* political debate show, “**Akthar Min Rai**” (More than One Opinion), host Sami Haddad brought together on February 18 Iraqi politicians and intellectuals to discuss the state of Iraq after the elections. The discussion focused on the position of the Kurds and Sunnis in the next stage of Iraqi politics, the process of drafting a constitution, and the implications of a possible religious state.

President Hosni Mubarak’s call for direct presidential elections spurred widespread debate in Egypt. Political commentator Muhammad Al Sayyid Said chaired a seminar to discuss the topic featuring representatives of various political trends, as **reported** in the UAE newspaper *Al Bayan* on March 3. The single most important question, according to Said, was whether this step would ignite a new dynamism within Egyptian society and thereby become an important milestone on the long road toward reform. Other participants in the discussion focused on the long history of

opposition and civil society demands for presidential elections and constitutional reforms, saying that the eventual development of a consensus on the issue across party lines—reinforced by developments in the region and foreign pressure—was what pushed Mubarak to make his proposal.

An editorial in the London-based pan-Arab *Al Quds Al Arabi* on March 2 comments on the London meeting on Palestinian reform and affirms that although it was a great demonstration of solidarity with the Palestinians, practical steps need to be taken for this solidarity to have an impact. It also argues that economic and security reform in Palestine will not be fruitful unless accompanied by political reform.

In an **article** in *Ash-Sharq Al Awsat* on March 10, Amr Hamzawy argues that the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia cannot be assessed using liberal benchmarks and ignoring historical and cultural specificities. Although the elections appear to have many shortcomings—exclusion of women, low levels of citizens’ participation, limited competences for local councilors—they must be evaluated in the context of the country’s political life. Reforming the authoritarian Saudi system can only follow a gradual path, and the elections are a first step.

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Read On

The U.S. role in promoting democratic change in the region is the focus of a new article by Steven A. Cook. “The Right Way to Promote Arab Reform” (*Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 2, March-April 2005, 91-102), argues that current U.S. policy is based on a mix of defective assumptions about the role of civil society, the transformative effect of economic development, and the efficacy of punitive policies to force change. In order to foster an environment in the Arab world that is conducive to reform without sacrificing key U.S. interests, policymakers should adopt an incentive-based approach to lead Arab countries that would fundamentally revise their institutions.

Most attempts so far to assess the salience of reforms in the region have been more politically motivated than analytically rigorous, says Marina Ottaway in “Evaluating Middle East Reform: How Do We Know When It Is Significant?” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 56, March 2005). Ottaway’s paper proposes looking at whether countries have undergone political paradigm shifts, and will be followed by a series of papers that will examine the question through case studies of individual Arab countries.

An International Crisis Group (ICG) report, “**Understanding Islamism**” (ICG, Middle East/North Africa, no. 7, March 2, 2005), argues that the “West’s failure to understand the very diverse nature of Islamic activism, and adopt a discriminating strategy in response, risks sidelining non-violent and modernist tendencies, and strengthening militant jihadis.”

A new survey of Arab public opinion carried out by the Jordanian Center for Strategic Studies reports that the “disapproval of Western foreign policy, most particularly as embodied by US policies in the Middle East, is at the heart of the fundamental disagreement between the West and the Arab World.” The survey, which was conducted from March to June 2004 in five Arab countries—Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine—also explores attitudes regarding the place of Islam in politics, the definition of terrorism, and the importance of Arab satellite TV in the formation of regional opinions. The report is entitled “**Revisiting the Arab Street: Research from Within**” (Center for Strategic Studies, Amman, February 2005).

The constitutional process in Iraq is the subject of four new publications:

- Marina Ottaway argues that although elections in Iraq were a success, they do not ensure that Iraqis can agree on a constitutional formula that accommodates the demands of all groups and keeps the country together (“**Iraq: Without Consensus, Democracy Is Not the Answer**,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief no. 36, March 2005).
- In the coming months, Iraqis will have to debate issues that are directly related to the role of Islam (and more specifically Islamic law), argues Nathan Brown in “**Debating Islam in post-Baathist Iraq**” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook, March 2005). Critical issues include writing a permanent constitution, personal status law, and a security agreement with the United States.

- A United States Institute of Peace (USIP) report emphasizes the importance of the constitutional process in Iraq as the only nonviolent opportunity for a workable compromise to be reached about the shape of the Iraqi nation (“**Iraq’s Constitutional Process: Shaping a Vision for the Country’s Future**,” USIP, Special Report no. 132, February 2005).
- Iraqi women must have an active role in shaping the future of their country, according to a new report by Amnesty International. “**Iraq: Decades of Suffering, Now Women Deserve better**” calls on Iraqi authorities to take effective measures to protect women and to change discriminatory legislation that encourages violence against them (Amnesty International, February 22, 2005).

Several new publications explore the challenge of democratic development in particular Arab countries:

- A Carnegie Policy Outlook by Julia Choucair, “**Lebanon’s New Political Moment**,” analyzes the challenges facing Lebanon’s political system after the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook, March 2005).
- The 2004 municipal elections in Lebanon demonstrated the potential political power Hizbollah could exercise in the 2005 parliamentary elections, observes Rodger Shanahan in “**Hizbollah Rising: The Political Battle for the Loyalty of the Shi’a of Lebanon**” (*MERIA*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 2005, 1-6). Although both Hizbollah and the Amal Movement compete for the same communal vote, Hizbollah emerged the much stronger party.
- In “**Syrian Reform: What Lies Beneath**” Farid N. Ghadry contends that better crafted U.S. and European diplomacy, including funding and publicly supporting reformists, could significantly advance the cause of reform and democratic change in Syria (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 1, Winter 2005, 61-70).
- Freedom House released “**Women’s Rights in Focus: Kuwait**,” on March 8. Based on assessments from focus group discussions carried out in Kuwait in July 2004, the report finds that there is modest support among Kuwaitis for giving women the vote, but less support for women to participate as candidates for office. The report recommends efforts to raise public awareness of the issue, framed within the Kuwaiti social context.
- In “**The Continued Costs of Political Stagnation in Egypt**” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook, February 2005), Amr Hamzawy analyzes the effects of Egypt’s persistent semiauthoritarianism, exemplified by the recent case of detained opposition politician Ayman Nour.

- A report by the New York-based Human Rights Watch accuses the Egyptian state security forces of arbitrarily arresting thousands of people and torturing detainees in the wake of the Taba Hilton bombing in October 2004. The report calls on the Egyptian government to establish a public registry of the 2,400 detainees still being held incommunicado and to investigate allegations of arbitrary arrest and torture (“**Mass Arrests and Torture in Sinai**,” Human Rights Watch, February 2005).
- The International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) Tunisia Monitoring Group, a group of 13 national and international organizations, criticizes the lack freedom of expression in Tunisia in “**Tunisia: Freedom of Expression under Siege**” (IFEX, February 2005). The report says that the Tunisian government should release all prisoners of opinion, end arbitrary detentions and the censorship of publications, and allow freedom of movement and assembly.
- John Ishiyama examines the evolution of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) following the collapse of the Soviet Union in “**The Sickle and the Minaret: Communist Successor Parties in Yemen and Afghanistan after the Cold War**” (*MERIA*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 2005, 7-29). The YSP has institutionalized its position in Yemeni society and will continue to play an important role in the country’s fragile experiment in electoral democracy.

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