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Insights and Analysis

Lebanon: After the Parliamentary Elections

Oussama Safa

The late American Congressman Tip O’Neill once opined that all politics is local; in Lebanon all politics is sectarian. Unlike in previous years, a few days ahead of the legislative elections on June 7 it is difficult to predict whether the opposition (known as March 8, which includes Hizballah) or the loyalists (known as March 14) will win. The electoral competition this time around is not only fierce and unnerving but worryingly polarizing along sectarian lines. Never before have legislative elections in Lebanon been so divisive, with discourse on both sides of the political divide focusing on what separates rather than unifies the Lebanese. Regardless of who emerges the victor on June 8, the Lebanese public will require some time to recover from relentless divisive campaigning.

Despite the fact that the new electoral law regulates election advertising and spending, the national commission supervising the electoral process has pointed out in its latest report 543 violations of media coverage and spending by candidates. It is unclear through what mechanism the recently-formed constitutional council, that is supposed to vet and rule on these violations, will deal with them on a case by case basis. Though it is a victory for democracy that the much-awaited council was formed ahead of election day, it will need to establish its credibility and seriousness in swift and decisive action that will first take into consideration the violations in spending and advertising. It remains to be seen whether the council will rule over appeals submitted on accusations of sectarian incitement which has been a major complaint by civil society in this election.

The elections will serve as a referendum—which is a rare occurrence in Lebanese history—on which political camp commands the larger following. While the country’s political landscape is largely divided between March 8 and March 14, a curious group of candidates calling themselves independent is emerging to punctuate this distinction and form a new political force in the country following the elections. It is this independent group that will tip the balance on June 7 if it succeeds in advancing a number of candidates. Regardless of the election’s outcome, however, Lebanon will still be under the tight grip of the opposition movement in the country.

In May 2008, armed followers of the opposition took to the streets and subdued West Beirut and areas under the control of loyalists. The armed standoff resulted in a mediated agreement in the

capital city of Doha which entailed granting the opposition veto rights in government. Prior to the Doha agreement, the opposition speaker of parliament had for a year and a half prevented the national assembly from legislating in an unprecedented paralysis of parliament. With the assured control of the executive and legislative branches of government, the opposition tightened its grip on the Lebanese system of governance, a situation unlikely to change after the June elections. Who actually wins on June 7 will remain largely irrelevant as long as both political camps cannot reach a negotiated understanding on how to govern the country without using a blocking minority vote in government or threats to close down the parliament.

Examining the candidates' campaigns, one is pressed to distill coherent issue-based political programs. Instead, most campaigns are dominated by either anti-Syria messages or pro-resistance slogans which indicate that neither March 8 nor March 14 has transformed its message since the 2005 elections. Whichever coalition dominates as a result of the elections, neither will have a decisive majority as to advance constitutional changes that would change the face of Lebanon. A post-election coalition government remains the most probable option.

If the opposition succeeds in clinching a majority—most likely a slim one—it will be able to designate the next prime minister and perhaps keep control of a few cabinet posts between its key pro-Syria actors (Hizballah, Shi'i Amal Movement, and Michel Aoun's Christian Free Patriotic Movement). If the current majority retains its slim lead, it will likely be unable to form a coalition government without again granting to the opposition veto power over cabinet decisions. In either case, the influence and political power of the March 8 opposition is likely to increase after the elections.

A strong showing by March 8 forces would translate into a restoration of Syrian influence in Lebanese politics, particularly as most opposition candidate lists include longtime Syrian allies. This will mean that Lebanese politics will be once again heavily influenced by policies friendly to Syria including, among others, curtailing cooperation between Lebanon and the Special International Tribunal set up to investigate the assassination in 2005 of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Among other implications, there will be a slowdown of the process of reforms that President Michel Suleiman plans to advance as well as cooperation with the international community on the implementation of UNSCR Resolution 1701 in south Lebanon.

As Lebanese politics are closely associated with regional dynamics, another election in the region to be watched closely is the one taking place five days later in Tehran. Whoever wins there—reformist or conservative—will weigh heavily on the direction that the Lebanese opposition plans to take in the future.

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Kuwait: New Faces, Same Potential for Trouble

Hesham Al-Awadi

The results of Kuwait's national assembly elections on May 16 came as a surprise. For the first time since being granted suffrage in 2005, women were able to win four seats in the 50-member

assembly, while the share of Islamists (Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists) waned, as did that of organized political movements at large in favor of liberal-leaning independent MPs. Shi'a, who comprise about 25 percent of Kuwait's population, were also able to expand their influence in parliament, picking up nine seats as compared to five in the previous assembly. Overall, 40 percent of the assembly members are new.

Despite the change in the assembly brought about by Kuwaiti voters and the optimistic note sounded by the election of women, a genuine transformation is not at hand. The future of the parliament and of democracy in Kuwait will still rely more on the makeup of the new government and its ability to put forward an economic program that can rescue the country from its stalled development path, as well as on the prime minister's willingness to be subjected to parliamentary questioning should MPs resort to this measure as they have in the past.

One historic aspect of the new National Assembly is the election of four women. One of them, Massouma al-Mubarak, took the top slot in her district, while another, Aseel al-Awadi, came in second in hers, outperforming veteran politician and former national assembly speaker Ahmed al-Saadoun by 891 votes. Although Rola Dashti only took seventh place (following two failed attempts in previous elections), she still came in ahead of prominent Islamist politician Walid al-Tabtabai.

The victory of Dashti, a liberal Shi'i in a Sunni-majority district, and al-Mubarak, a Shi'i who received heavy Sunni support, suggests an unexpected transformation in Kuwaiti society. Although sectarian divisions between Shi'a and Sunna had some impact on voters' choices, their importance has declined among younger urban voters. The religious pretexts employed by Islamists in preventing women from reaching parliament also appeared to fall on deaf ears; two of the four women elected do not wear the *hijab* (headscarf). Overall, voters seemed frustrated and ready to give women a chance for change.

The other notable change in the assembly is the declining popularity of organized political movements in general, especially Islamist ones. The Islamic Constitutional Movement (known by its Arabic acronym, *Hadas*) fell from three seats to a single seat, with only Jaaman al-Harbash reelected with support that was more tribal than ideological. The Salafist Movement's share dropped from four seats to two, and the National Islamic Alliance (Shi'i) fell from two seats to one. The backlash against political organizations affected not only Islamists, but liberals as well, with the Kuwait Democratic Forum and National Democratic Alliance each dropping down to only a single seat. Although the idea of officially legalizing political parties is currently being discussed as a step towards further political liberalization, the victory of a significant number of independents—though some do have ideological loyalties—suggests that the popular mood in Kuwait might not be ready for such a move.

Despite the change brought about by the election results, this does not rule out the possibility that the assembly could be dissolved before it completes its session in 2013. Although there was 40 percent turnover in the assembly members, underlying factors remain that could create tension between parliament and the government. First, the new assembly includes some MPs who have insisted on questioning the prime minister, which since 2006 has led to the government stepping down five times and the national assembly being dissolved three times. No fewer than four of

what the pro-government media label “the trouble-making MPs,” who use their constitutional right to question the prime minister, were reelected, showing that these MPs have substantial electoral support. Parliamentary questioning may be delayed for a short time, but will not disappear as a feature of Kuwaiti democratic practice.

Second, Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed al-Sabah will once again head the cabinet, as he has done since 2006. Sheikh Nasser became prime minister after Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmed stepped down from the position, and after objections were raised against Defense Minister Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak as a possible alternative. Although Sheikh's Nasser's popularity has risen since he returned from a recuperative trip abroad, parliamentary questioning could still start up again as a result of the way he runs his government.

As for the new cabinet announced on May 29, 40 percent of its members are different from the previous one. This will help a bit to ease tensions with parliament. Despite the lower number of women in the new government (down to one, compared with two in the previous government) and an increase in the number of ministers from the ruling family, the introduction of seven new ministers has generated some optimism in public opinion. Although the quota system was applied to guarantee proportional representation of various tribes and ideological persuasions, many of the new ministers are professionals with expertise in their respective fields. Thus the cabinet is viewed as more technocratic in nature. But regardless of the temporary optimism, tension will continue to plague relations between the two branches as long as the government does not come forth with a comprehensive economic development plan.

Given these factors, the government will have no option but to take advantage of the new assembly's makeup—with which the political leadership overall is quite pleased—by proposing a comprehensive program to jumpstart Kuwait's stagnant economic development. Perhaps the presence of liberal-leaning, more pro-government MPs can strengthen cooperation between the two branches, and help make a push towards the Kuwaiti dream of transforming the country into a global financial center. But there is also now a preponderance of opinion, within both the state and society, that parliamentary questioning of government officials is proper. Therefore the possibility that MPs will resume their efforts to pin down the prime minister, and that the parliament will be dissolved again, possibly unconstitutionally, continues to loom on the horizon.

Hesham al-Awadi is a professor of international studies and director of the Gulf Studies Center at the American University in Kuwait. Paul Wulfsberg translated this article from Arabic.

Iraq: The Status and Future of the Awakening Movements

Michael Knights

Although Iraq is a far more stable and secure place than it was in 2007 or 2008, violence has slowly increased in 2009. According to the security company Olive Group, there were 1,242 reported security incidents in Iraq in April 2009, compared with 1,168 in March and 1,103 in February. The gradual increase in security incidents in provinces such as Baghdad, Nineveh, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din has spurred questions about the prospects for ethnic-sectarian reconciliation in the months leading up to vital parliamentary elections in early 2010.

Parliamentary elections scheduled for January 2010 could see a substantial shake-up of the political landscape established under Coalition occupation since 2003. Iraq could vote for the same ethnic and sectarian blocs that have dominated since Saddam's fall, or empower a new cross-sectarian political center rooted in Arab nationalism. Sensing what role will be played by the Sunni Arab community and particularly the Sahwa or Awakening movements is a vital factor in understanding current security problems and future political coalition-building.

Before examining the future prospects of the Sahwa, it is worth looking closely at what exactly they are. U.S. forces began engaging successfully with Sunni tribes in Anbar province in late 2005, when U.S. Marines worked with local tribal leaders to expel al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) from the governorate. In September 2006, the process was expanded and formalized when Sheikh Abd al-Sattar al-Rishawi (known as Sattar Abu Risha,) convened the first Sahwa meeting, drawing together 45 tribal leaders from around Ramadi to successfully convince 4,500 Sunni Arabs, including many former insurgents, to join the Anbar police.

Under the U.S.-led surge from 2007 onwards, Sahwa councils spread throughout Sunni Arab communities as a forum where U.S. military and tribal leaders could talk and coordinate security actions. Sahwa councils also participated in U.S.-brokered reconciliation talks between Sunni and Shia community leaders. Sahwa councils increasingly became a place where local reconstruction needs were discussed, drawing in Iraqi local municipal and military officials. In essence, the Sahwa operated in parallel to official provincial, district and sub-district councils where they were did not include local Sunni Arab leaders. In contrast to the 2006 Sahwa movements (whose members directly joined the government security forces), the Sahwa movements established during the surge took the unprecedented step of creating temporary paid security forces called the "Sons of Iraq" that were not officially part of the government security forces.

The Sahwa movements thus began as a U.S. initiative but the last twelve months have witnessed the Awakening movements being absorbed into a range of official political and security institutions of the Iraqi state. Sahwa leaders have been incorporated into a strengthening web of local government institutions such as District Development Forums and Neighborhood Advisory Councils. Many Sahwa leaders participated in provincial elections in January 2009; the most successful Sahwa candidates were in Anbar, where Sheikh Abd al-Jabbar al-Rishawi (known as Jabbar Abu Risha) led the Iraq Awakening Council to a leading position on the provincial council. Elsewhere in Iraq, well-known Sahwa leaders tended to succeed best when they allied themselves with political parties such as Saleh Mutlaq's Iraqi Front for National Dialogue, the Mosul-based al-Hadba party and even the Iraqi Islamic Party in places such as Diyala province. Instead of being engaged directly as tribal groups by the U.S. military or the central government, the Sahwa leaders are normalizing their relations with the Iraqi state within the framework of local governance and elections.

The same goes for the security role of the Sahwa. The Sons of Iraq are being slowly but steadily absorbed into alternative forms of employment; all 90,000 have now been registered and their age, skills, aims, and educational level categorized. Approximately 20,000 have either already joined the police service or are in the process of applying for jobs in the federal security forces. The 47,000 Sons of Iraq in Baghdad are being used as a trial run for the demobilization system

that will see most fighters absorbed into construction or industrial work based at vocational technical centers. The Iraqi government has committed to pay the salaries of Sons of Iraq fighters until they receive new jobs, and the U.S. military keeps a close eye on the issue, which it regards as essential to improving the security situation.

So what is next for the Sahwa, the Sons of Iraq and ethno-sectarian reconciliation in Iraq? In political terms, the Sunni Arab community is wide awake. But the provincial elections underlined the need for Sunni Arab politicians, and particularly tribal leaders, to combine their efforts and form more cohesive political blocs to contest the national elections. At present, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is considering drawing a range of Sunni Arab allies into a new coalition, including Mutlaq's National Dialogue, al-Hadba, and the Iraq Awakening Council. The national elections could have mixed effects on reconciliation in Iraq, with reduced inter-Arab sectarian tension but widening Arab-Kurdish ethnic divisions. Anti-Kurdish rhetoric was key to al-Hadba's strong victory in the Nineveh provincial elections and this theme may emerge again in the national elections.

On the security front, the Sons of Iraq remain a stabilizing force. Though some Sons of Iraq are dissatisfied with slow payment and job creation, or are concerned that the government is arresting too many Sons of Iraq leaders, the vast majority of the leadership and foot soldiers continue to work towards stability in their neighborhoods. There is little solidarity between Sons of Iraq leaders and little prospect that scattered arrests will drive them to a collective abandonment of cooperation with the government. The minor security downturn in Iraq should be kept in proportion—the 1,242 incident in April 2009 is less than half the 2,799 incidents reported in April 2008. There are many causes of the recent rise in incidents and the release of tens of thousands of militant detainees from U.S. detention facilities is likely a more significant driver than a broad failure of reconciliation. Iraq continues to slowly edge towards stability and the leaders that made up the Sahwa are mostly working within new institutions and political processes to support the country's recovery at the same time as representing their local constituencies.

Michael Knights is the Lafer International fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Yemen: Economic Crisis Underpins Southern Separatism

Ginny Hill

Political violence in south Yemen escalated sharply during May, with a small but unconfirmed number of fatalities, hundreds arrested, and several newspapers shuttered. Protestors first took to the streets two years ago, when retired officers from the disbanded southern army demanded higher pension payments. The southern movement has gathered momentum in recent months, partly due to the regime's heavy-handed response, and built an untested coalition based around perceptions of southern marginalization. Protestors are now openly calling for independence.

The secessionist language deployed by protestors suggests they are seeking to reverse the creation of the modern republic in 1990, which united the Marxist People's Democratic Republic

of Yemen (PDRY, South Yemen) with the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) at the end of the Cold War. Secessionists complain that President Ali Abdullah Saleh failed to implement the terms of the 1990 power-sharing agreement between the two countries and to honor the terms of the ceasefire after a brief civil war in 1994.

Southern secessionists perceive the president's Sanhan clan, based in the northern mountain capital, Sana'a, to be running the country in its own interests. Grievances include land seizures, the forced retirement of southern security officials, the exclusion of southerners from northern patronage networks, corruption, and economic mismanagement. Tension in the south has risen further since parliamentary elections, scheduled for April 2009, were postponed for two years. The southern movement is driven by popular frustration with the northern elite, but its leadership is still seeking to unite around a coherent agenda. The current coalition of tribal sheikhs, civic leaders, and prematurely retired military officers is allied to former leftist politicians living in exile. Former southern president Ali Salem al-Baidh, speaking in Germany in May, promised to "lead a peaceful struggle" to reclaim "the occupied south." Al-Baidh denied he was seeking to revive the politics of the Cold War era: "I'm not in a party, and will not join any party, but after liberation I may like to be an advisor."

The new complexion of twenty-first century southern separatism was confirmed in April, when veteran Afghan *mujahid* and presidential ally Tariq al-Fadhli declared his support for the secessionist struggle. Al-Fadhli belongs to a leading family in the southern governorate of Abyan who lost their land during the PDRY nationalisation program. Al-Fadhli returned to Yemen after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and played a key role in the post-Cold War settlement in Yemen. He helped President Saleh defeat the Socialists in Yemen's 1994 civil war and set about reclaiming his family land in Abyan. He remained a paid adviser to the Ministry of Interior.

Al-Fadhli's defection suggests that Yemen's extensive patronage system is under strain and the logic underpinning the modern republic is now in flux. Since unification in 1990, President Saleh has relied on patronage to bind his proxies to the center and bypass the painstaking process of state building. Patronage structures created the inequalities and resentments now articulated throughout the south, yet provided President Saleh with a framework to minimize dissent when the money was available.

Yemen's oil sector provides 90 percent of export earnings and 75 percent of government revenue. But Yemen's oil production has passed its peak and daily output has declined from 460,000 barrels per day in 2002 to 268,000 barrels per day forecast for 2010. Total crude oil exports generated \$7.6 billion in 2008, reflecting the spike in global oil prices, but forecasts suggest revenue will drop to \$2.8 billion during 2009. The World Bank predicts that state revenues from oil sales will fall to zero in 2017.

Poor security conditions, unpromising geology, and questions about Yemen's socio-economic trajectory prevent extensive exploration for new fields by international oil companies. Anticipated income from a new liquid natural gas plant, which is due to start exports from the south coast later this year, will not replace returns from diminishing oil exports over the long-term. These economic pressures are already generating acute political tension. Presidential

proxies (such as Tarik al-Fadhli) and opposition figures are looking ahead and considering their options.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia recently named Yemen as its number one threat to internal security, following the merger earlier this year of al-Qaeda in Yemen and al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. In an Internet statement released in May, al-Qaeda commander Nasser al-Wuhayshi pledged his support for the southern separatists. “Ali Abdullah Saleh is an infidel and an agent,” he said. “The time for the rule of Islam has come so that you could bask in the justice and tolerance it brings.”

President Saleh is calling for national dialogue and promising constitutional reform, decentralization, and economic diversification. Displays of military hardware during May’s Unity Day parades celebrating the nineteenth anniversary of unification, however, showed that the regime is not prepared to take the chance that talks might fail. Negotiations will place pressure on both the northern elite and the leaders of the southern independence movement to overcome their internal differences and compromise with each other. The speed with which talks proceed will determine whether the southern protest movement is diffused, protestors continue to engage in sporadic clashes with the security services, or the confrontation escalates. Against this backdrop, the economic situation looks set to deteriorate.

Ginny Hill is a freelance journalist and author of [‘Yemen: Fear of Failure’](#), a Chatham House briefing paper.

Morocco: Electoral Reform with Public Relations Value

Geoffrey Weichselbaum and Michael Meyer-Resende

“More women elected,” “Higher Voter Turn-Out,” “Fewer Seats for the Islamic Party” may well be the headlines after Morocco’s local elections on June 12. Such outcomes would not mean, however, that Moroccans are becoming more egalitarian, eager to vote, or secular. They would be a direct result of electoral reforms in December 2008. While the changes were generally positive, they focused on issues that will improve Morocco’s image rather than on long-standing deficits in the transparency of elections.

The 2007 elections to the lower house of parliament were marked by a low turnout of 37 percent of registered voters. Given that many of those eligible do not register, the actual turnout was estimated to be a dismal 25 percent of the electorate. Even if voter apathy persists in the local elections, a technical change will give the impression that more voters went to the polls. Recent changes to registration regulations resulted in three million voters being taken off the lists for a variety of reasons, including failure to respond to inquiries by the administration or double inscriptions. With 1.6 million new voters registered this year, there are 1.4 million fewer voters than in the 2007 elections. The total number of registered voters is now close to 14 million out of an estimated 20 million eligible. Given that turnout is measured against registered voters, the percentage would be higher if the same number of people went to the polls in June as in 2007. The Ministry of the Interior estimates an automatic statistical increase in turnout of 8 percent.

The recent electoral reforms also introduced mechanisms that will favor the election of women to local councils, notably the introduction of lists reserved for female candidates. This may propel the percentage of women in local councils beyond 11 percent, up from less than one percent in the 2003 local elections. While this will be a positive change, an increased number of female council members should not be understood to be the result of societal change. It is rather a top-down attempt to effect such change.

These local elections will be the first test for the new Party for Authenticity and Modernity, founded by former Deputy Minister of the Interior Fouad Ali Al-Himma. The party champions better policy performance, and good results in the local elections will be decisive to gain momentum, with the next direct parliamentary elections due in 2012. The Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD) will also be looking to perform well; its results in the 2007 parliamentary elections (10.9 percent) fell short of what many analysts had expected.

The election law uses two different electoral systems: a proportional list-based system in larger municipalities and single member constituencies with the first-past-the-post system in smaller municipalities in the countryside. The latter (used in 1,411 municipalities throughout the country compared to 92 larger municipalities) favors those parties that are strongest in rural areas, such as the conservative Istiqlal party and the Popular Movement. For parties with more support in the cities, such as the PJD, it will be difficult to win seats in the countryside.

The recent change of the law increased from 25,000 to 35,000 inhabitants the threshold that divides small from large municipalities. The government says that this change ensures that municipalities use the same electoral system they used five years ago, even if their population grew in the meantime. In terms of seats won across the country, this law change favors the traditional conservative parties.

While the recent changes to the electoral law are positive, they conspicuously avoid any of the long-demanded steps that would make the elections overall more transparent. The aggregation and publication of polling station results countrywide remains difficult to follow for anybody except the administration, which does not publish these data. There is still no legal framework for non-partisan election observation. The lack of a framework resulted in frictions between the domestic observers and the administration in the 2007 elections and deterred domestic groups from launching a large observation effort for the June 2009 elections. Observers report on shortcomings, and when detailed results are promptly published it may turn out that they do not always add up. That would not be the story that Moroccan authorities hope the media will tell about the elections: higher voter turn-out, more women elected, and no dramatic increase in support for the PJD.

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News and Views

Kuwait: New Cabinet Appointed; Election Results

Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser al-Sabah announced a new cabinet on May 30, the sixth under the leadership of Sheikh Nasser since his appointment in February 2006. Most key ministers kept their positions including Minister of Energy and Deputy Prime Minister for economic Affairs Shaikh Ahmed Fahad al-Sabah, Minister of Oil Shaikh Ahmed Abdullah al-Sabah, and Minister of Finance Musafa al-Shamili. New appointments included Ahmed al-Haroun as Minister of Commerce and Industry, Bader al-Azmi as Minister of Electricity and Water, and Fadhel Safar as Minister of Public Works. Women ministers decreased from two to one, Mudhi al-Hamoud as Minister of Education and Higher Education. The last cabinet resigned after MPs requested to question the Prime Minister in March 2009. Click [here](#) for more.

Four women were elected to the National Assembly on May 16, a first for Kuwait, where women gained suffrage four years ago. The four are civil society activist Rula Dashti; professor of education Salwa al-Jassar; professor of philosophy Aseel al-Awadhi; and Moussama al-Mubarak, who in 2005 was the first woman to serve as a cabinet minister. Voter turn out was reportedly under 60 percent (385,000 eligible voters). The Islamist Salafi Alliance lost three seats (keeping only two) and the Islamic Constitutional Movements lost two seats (keeping one) to Shi'i tribal alliances, liberals, and independents. Overall 19 of the 50 elected members were new. The Kuwait Transparency Agency monitored the elections. Click [here](#) for a list of candidates of the five districts.

Emir Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah reappointed Shaikh Nasser al-Sabah prime minister of the new government on May 20. The Emir dissolved the parliament on March 18 after the cabinet (headed by Shaikh Nasser al-Sabah) resigned on March 17, following a crisis brought on by MP's request to question prime minister. The last parliamentary elections took place in May 2008, after a similar stand off between members of parliament and the cabinet.

Palestine: Fatah Hamas Tension Escalates; Fayyad Cabinet Sworn in; Cabinet Announcement Postponed; Fatah Conference Finalized

Six people died and two were wounded during a clash between members of the security service and Hamas's Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigade on May 31. Also 22 Hamas members were arrested in the West Bank on accusations of money laundering and inciting violence. Fatah denied that the arrests were made on political grounds. Hamas blames Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and indicated it might withdraw from the ongoing national dialogue in Cairo. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's cabinet was sworn in on May 20 in what Hamas called a move to sabotage the ongoing national dialogue in Cairo, the fifth round of which ended on May 19 with no progress. Fayyad stressed that the new government is a temporary one, intended to facilitate Gaza reconstruction, until a final power sharing agreement is reached between Hamas and Fatah. The largely technocratic new government includes Fatah members and independents. Appointments include Minister of Interior Said Abu Ali, Minister of Planning Ali al-Jerbawi, Minister of Foreign Affairs Riad al-Maliki, Minister of Labor Ahmed Majdalani and Minister of Economy Bassem Khouri. The new cabinet includes four women: Minister of Social Affairs Majeda al-Masri, Minister of Culture Siham al-Barghouti, Minister of Education Lamis al-Alami, and Minister of Tourism Khulud Di'bes. Click [here](#) for the list of ministers.

Prime Minister-designate Salam Fayyad announced on May 13 that announcement of a new Palestinian cabinet, expected to be sworn in on May 13, will be postponed in order to complete negotiations regarding its final composition. Yasser Abd Rabbo, member of the PLO's executive committee announced on May 11 that the cabinet, selected by President Mahmoud Abbas and headed by Fayyad, will include mostly Fatah and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) members as well as a few independents. Independent Mustafa Barghouti is among the new names and is to fill the post of Minister of Information, while other key figures such as Foreign Minister Riad al-Maliki and Minister of Interior Abdel Razak al-Yahya, will retain their posts. Independent Hanan Ashrawi declined an offer to serve as Minister of Education. Palestinian officials indicated that the new government is likely to serve as a transitional government until a clear power-sharing agreement is reached between Fatah and Hamas or until the presidential and legislative elections are held in 2010. Hamas officials say a new cabinet would sabotage unity talks scheduled to continue in Cairo on May 16. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum indicated that the unilateral move would worsen the divide and exacerbate the state of "legal and constitutional chaos." Click [here](#) for the new list of ministers in Arabic.

President Abbas announced on May 13 that the long overdue sixth Fatah conference will take place on July 1 in the Palestinian territories, either in Bethlehem or Jericho. More than 1200 Fatah members, including those in Gaza, are expected to attend the conference. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Morocco: Party for Modernity and Authenticity Joins Opposition

The Party for Modernity and Authenticity announced on May 29 that it would leave the governing coalition and join the opposition bloc. The party indicated that the split was due to disagreement with members of governing coalition; Mohamed Shaikh, the party's secretary general, specifically cited other coalition members' efforts to marginalize the role of the party and its elected members. The party currently has 40 representatives in parliament. The change comes ahead of local elections schedule for June 12. Campaigning began on May 30; candidates representing 30 parties are competing for 27,795 seats in some 1,503 communes. Twelve percent of seats are reserved for women. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Egypt: Opposition Leader Assaulted; Activist Jail Sentence Cancelled

Al-Ghad Party leader Ayman Nour suffered first degree burns to the face and neck from a firebomb tossed into his car on May 23. Nour suggested that the attack might be connected to his recent announcement of plans to run in the 2011 presidential election. Ayman Nour came in second in his 2005 bid for presidency, and was convicted shortly afterward on fraud charges. He was released earlier this year before the end of his sentence. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

A Cairo appeals court acquitted Egyptian civil society activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim of defaming the government and false information on May 25. Ibrahim, who is in exile, had been sentenced to two years in prison in August 2008. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Libya: Political Prisoner Dies

Libyan political prisoner Fathi al-Jahmi passed away in Amman, Jordan where he was receiving medical attention, on May 20 from unknown causes. His health deteriorated slowly until he went into a coma on May 3 and was flown to Amman Medical Center on May 5. Al-Ajmi was

arrested in October 2002, after he called for free and fair elections and freedom of the press and was sentenced to five years in prison. In 2004, an appeals court lowered his sentence to a suspended one-year in jail. Shortly after his release he was arrested after an interview with Al-Hurra television criticizing the government and has been in custody since. Click for Human Rights Watch [statement](#) on al-Jahmi's death.

Syria: Human Rights Activist Released; U.S. Sanctions Extended

Author and human rights activist Michel Kilo was released on May 19 after completing a three year prison sentence. Kilo was arrested calling on the regime to pursue widespread reform and improve relations with Lebanon. Kilo was one of the main signatories of the Damascus Declaration published in May 2006. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

U.S. President Barack Obama signed an executive order on May 7 extending sanctions against Syria, originally imposed 2004. Click [here](#) for more.

Saudi Arabia: Local Elections Postponed

The Saudi Cabinet postponed the kingdom's local elections, scheduled for 2009, until 2011 on May 19 in order to reform municipal council laws. The first local elections were held in Saudi Arabia in 2005 to elect half of the municipal council's 178 members. The other half were appointed by the king. Women could not vote or run in the 2005 elections and it is unclear whether they will participate in 2011. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

UAE: Cabinet Reshuffle

Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan approved a cabinet reshuffle on May 11 that included appointing two new deputy prime ministers and swapping the education and health ministry ministers. Minister of Interior Shaikh Saif Bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Minister of Presidential Affairs Shaikh Mansour Bin Zayed al-Nahyan were appointed deputies to the prime minister (replacing Shaikh Sultan Bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Shaik Hamad Bin Zayed al-Nahyan). Former Minister of Education Hanifa Hassan Ali was appointed Minister of Health and former Minister of Health Humaid Mohammed Obeid al-Qattami is now Minister of Education. The new ministers were sworn in on May 13. Click [here](#) for more.

Upcoming Political Events

- Lebanon: Parliamentary elections, June 7, 2009
- Iran: Presidential election, June 12, 2009
- Morocco: Local elections, June 12, 2009
- Tunisia: Presidential election, October 2009
- Iraq: Parliamentary elections, January 2010

Views from the Arab Media

- Kuwaitis voted for change in their latest parliamentary elections on May 16. In an [article](#) published in the Kuwaiti daily *al-Rai* on May 22, Jassem Boudi stressed that the new

leadership has an opportunity to establish more cooperative relations between the executive and legislative branches. This could finally allow Kuwaitis to realize the economic and social developments they desire.

- The United States, Europe, and Israel are watching nervously as Lebanon prepares for critical parliamentary elections, whose outcome is likely to change the political make up internally and ripple across the region. Talal Salman points out in a May 27 [article](#) in the daily *al-Safir* that in addition to a flawed and divisive electoral law, the Lebanese must also contend with ongoing external attempts to manipulate the outcome of the elections. As the Lebanese experiment may yet prove, elections are not always the path to democracy.
- Al-Jazeera's weekly show "[al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis](#)" (The Opposite Direction) hosted a debate May 19 on the ongoing tension between the government and separatist movements in the south of Yemen. The show featured two Yemeni speakers: Southern Democratic Assembly spokesman Abdu al-Naqeeb and pro-government author and journalist Abbas Massawi. Al-Naqeeb claimed that the government has neglected, marginalized, and oppressed the southerners, and poverty and popular dismay have pushed them to demand independence. Massawi condemned the separatist "rebels" and their occupation propaganda, and argued that southern Yemen has witnessed unprecedented levels of growth and development on every level since unification in 1994.
- Although Saudi Arabian intellectuals are fiercely critical of extremism, Saudi youth are still susceptible to the appeal of radical movements. In his May 25 [article](#) in the pan-Arab daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Saudi columnist Tarik al-Hamid questions the effectiveness of government measures in combating extremist groups and terrorism. The Saudi government must expand these efforts, al-Hamid argues, and begin by engaging Saudi youth in a national dialogue on the causes of extremism. The government should also reassess the roles and the structures of organizations that influence Saudi children, particularly schools and religious institutions.
- Twenty-eight years after its inception, the Gulf Cooperation Council needs to overhaul its outdated regulations and internal processes. Mohammed al-'Assoumi stresses in a May 27 [article](#) in the UAE daily *al-Ittihad* that the GCC's decision to establish the Gulf Central Bank in Riyadh underlines the need to reassess its decision-making mechanisms. Al-'Assoumi argues that the UAE is a more suitable choice than Saudi Arabia for a central bank, given its vast experience in international finance and banking. The UAE has flexible state regulations and laws conducive to the creation of new financial and monetary institutions at regional and global levels.
- The future of Hesham Tal'at's Egyptian business empire is in jeopardy as he faces a death sentence for his implication in the murder of Lebanese singer Suzanne Tammim in Dubai in July, 2008. In a May 25 [article](#) in the daily *al-Masry al-Youm*, Ahmed al-Sawi argues that the businesses Tal'at presided over contributed for years to economic development and provided jobs locally and nationally. In al-Sawi's view, these

businesses should be protected, so that no one else is punished for a crime only one man committed.

Read On

Recent publications on the **Lebanese parliamentary elections** include:

- [“Lebanon’s Elections Should Pave the Way for Human Rights Improvements”](#) (Amnesty International, May 2009).
- [“Lebanon’s Upcoming Elections: Excuse Me, Can You Explain That One More Time,”](#) by Richard Chambers and Deen Sharp (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, May 12, 2009).

Recent publications on **Iraq** include:

- [“Occupying Iraq: A Short History of the CPA,”](#) by James Dobbins (*Survival*, vol. 51, no. 3, June 2009, 131-62).
- [“A Crisis Like No Other? Anti-Americanism at the Time of the Iraq War,”](#) by Giacomo Chiozza (*European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 15, no. 2, June 2009, 257-89).
- [“Iraq: Trends in Violence and Civilian Casualties: 2005-2009,”](#) by Anthony Cordesman (Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 5, 2009).
- [“Maliki’s Iraq Between Two Elections,”](#) by Daniel Serwer and Sam Parker (United States Institute of Peace, USIPeace Briefing, May 2009).
- [“The Limits of Institutional Engineering: Lessons from Iraq,”](#) by David Waldner (United States Institute of Peace, Special Report no. 222, May 2009).
- [“Populism, Authoritarianism, and National Security in Al-Maliki’s Iraq,”](#) by Michael Eisenstadt (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1515, May 12, 2009).

Other publications on **U.S. policy** in the Middle East include:

- [“Democracy Promotion Under Obama: Lessons from the Middle East Partnership Initiative,”](#) by Tamara Cofman Wittes and Andrew Masloski (Brookings Institution, May 2009).
- [“Last Chance: The Middle East in the Balance,”](#) David Gardner (Macmillan, May 2009).

- [“Looking Forward: An Integrated Strategy for Supporting Democracy and Human Rights in Egypt.”](#) by Gregory L. Aftandilian (May 2009, Project on Middle East Democracy).
- [“The Obama-Netanyahu Meeting: Analysis and Assessment,”](#) by Robert Staloff (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1518, May 21, 2009).
- [“Are Obama and Netanyahu Destined to Clash?”](#) by David Makovsky (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1517, May 15, 2009).
- [“Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey”](#) (University of Maryland and Zogby International, May 2009).

Publications on **Palestine** include:

- [“Fayad’s New Government: Implications and Challenges.”](#) by Mohammad Yaghi (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1520, May 22, 2009).
- [“Palestine: Not Better But Worse,”](#) by Khaled Amayreh (Arab Reform Initiative, May 21, 2009).
- [Palestinian Women and Politics in Israel](#), Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud (University Press of Florida, May 31, 2009).

Recent publications on the **Gulf** include:

- [“Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb”](#) (International Crisis Group, Middle East Report no. 86, May 2009).
- [“The United Arab Emirates: Prospectives for Political Reform,”](#) by Christopher Davidson (*The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring/Summer 2009).
- [“The Shia of Saudi Arabia at a Crossroads,”](#) by Toby Matthiesen (Middle East Report Online, May 6, 2009).
- [“Gulf Threats, Risks and Vulnerabilities,”](#) by Anthony Cordesman and Adam Seitz (Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 22, 2009).
- [“The Island of Happiness: Exploitation of Migrant Workers on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi”](#) (Human Rights Watch, May 19, 2009).
- [“The Yemeni Elections: Outcome and Prospects,”](#) by Mohammed Ahmad Ali Al-Makhlafi (Arab Reform Initiative, May 20, 2009).
- [The Gulf Yearbook 2008-2009](#), published by the Gulf Research Center includes a review of Gulf developments in 2008, focusing on economic, security and defense issues, in addition to foreign domestic challenges throughout GCC countries.

Publications on **economic reform** include:

- “[Arab Countries Stumble in the Face of Growing Economic Crisis](#),” by Ibrahim Saif and Farah Choucair (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2009).
- “[Managing Arab Sovereign Wealth in Turbulent Times-and Beyond](#),” by Sven Behrendt and Bassma Kodmani (Arab Reform Initiative, May 27, 2009).
- “[Missed by the Boom, Hurt by the Bust: Making Markets Work for Young People in the Middle East](#)” by Navtej Dhillion, Djavad Saleh-Isfahani, Paul Dyer, Tarik Yousef, Amina Fahmy, and Mary Kraetsch (Brookings Institution, The Middle East Youth Initiative, May 2009).
- “[Regional Economic Outlook: Middle East and Central Asia](#)” (International Monetary Fund, May 2009).

Other publications on **religion and politics** in the Middle East include:

- “[Vicissitudes in the Entente Between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the State in Egypt \(1952-2007\)](#),” by Mariz Tadros (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, May 2009, 269-87).
- “The Muslim Brotherhood and the Emerging Shia Crescent,” by Samuel Helfront (*Orbis*, vol. 53, no. 2, Spring 2009).
- “[The Jihadist International: Al Qaeda’s Advance in the Levant](#),” by Hassan Mneimneh (American Enterprise Institute, May 2009).

Other recent publications include:

- “[Guests of the Governor, Administrative Detention Undermines the Rule of Law in Jordan](#)” (Human Rights Watch, May 26, 2009).
- The May issue of *al-Mustaqbal al-arabi* (Arab Future) published by the Center for Arab Unity Studies in Beirut, includes an overview of regional developments in 2008-2009, in addition to articles on the economic and social repercussions of the oil boom in GCC countries, the political role of tribes in Iraq, and a discussion on the jurisdiction of the ICC and its relationship to national courts.