

Arab Reform Bulletin

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The Arabic edition of this issue of the *Arab Reform Bulletin* will be available by April 25 at <http://www.alwatan.com.kw/arb>.

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We welcome your comments or suggestions. Please e-mail the editor at arb@CarnegieEndowment.org.

Note from the Editor:

We are pleased to introduce two new features this month. First, we present an interview with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Cheney, the first in a series of occasional interviews the *Arab Reform Bulletin* will conduct with officials and activists involved in promoting reform in the Arab world. Second, we offer an article originally written in Arabic (“Lebanon : Elections Endangered” by Walid Choucair) and translated for this edition. As always, I welcome your suggestions about how to make the English and Arabic language editions of the *Bulletin* more informative and useful to you.

—Michele Dunne

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Insights and Analysis

Interview with Elizabeth Cheney, U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs

The issue of reform in the Middle East seems to have a higher profile in President Bush's second term. Does this reflect a shift in policy, a change in players, or a response to events in the region?

Dedication to the promotion of freedom has been part of U.S. foreign policy in the Arab world, particularly since September 11. What's different now are the very important events in the broader Middle East: elections in Afghanistan, the Palestinian Authority, and Iraq. I think the Iraqi election on January 30 had a profound impact across the region; everybody who watched on TV that day was moved by the bravery and power of the Iraqi people. What we're seeing I think are people feeling inspired and a beginning of a lifting of the burden of fear. You sense it when you talk to people; you see it in the bravery of the Lebanese people gathered in Martyrs' Square. It's a new sense of what is possible to talk about and to do. There is tremendous progress in the region and we want to do whatever we can to help support it.

President Bush has said that the United States will support reformers in the Middle East, but many Arab activists and intellectuals say that U.S. involvement hurts rather than helps. How can the United States support reformers who reject its assistance?

We are guided in all of what we do by individual people in countries who are working for freedom. We provide support to people who want the support. I also think there is a bit of a misconception. President Bush has—in a more public and direct way than any previous American president—put the United States on the side of people fighting for democracy in the Arab world. We are very sincere in that. We want people to judge us by our actions and we want to provide support where we can. But what is interesting to me, coming back after a year or so away, is that we are now responding to the quick pace of developments in the region. It isn't a situation where the United States is setting the agenda or timetable.

What position does the United States take regarding the participation of Islamists in political life?

It's important to look at Islamists as we would other political parties. There are some standard red lines that the international community applies to political groups. Groups that use violence or advocate the use of violence clearly put themselves outside democratic political processes, whether they're Islamist or not. Regarding non-violent Islamist groups, it's important to look at their platforms and what they would be likely to do once elected. You can't lump all Islamist groups together. Would they respect the rights of others, including women, minorities, and non-Muslims? I don't see it as Islamist versus secular parties, but rather of applying standard guidelines and rules about securing a democracy and making sure that violence isn't part of the political process.

Some groups, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, have not been involved in violence in many years and have said they would respect a democratic process, yet they remain illegal.

For a long time in many countries, the only two voices that have been heard have been the government or extremist groups. I am confident that the vast majority of people in the Arab world, as everywhere, are not extremists. What's important is to open up these systems so that other voices can be heard and people have a real choice to make. People need to have access to media and an ability to campaign and get their messages out. It's very difficult to judge the true strength of these groups in the current environment.

The 2004 Arab Human Development Report was issued last week. What concerns did the United States have about the report, and why did it ask for the report's revision before it was launched?

We were briefed on the report a few days ago, and I think it will be on the whole a good report. There are policy differences, and I'm sure the report will talk about some issues in ways that we would not, but I think it will be an important report, as the others have been. We are looking forward to it. It is simply not the case that the U.S. urged the deferral of this report. We welcome it.

The administration has recently been calling publicly for Egypt to undertake political reforms. Which other countries in the region present opportunities for U.S. attention to and pressure for reform?

We don't look at this as "where can we put pressure next?" It's more about the march of events across the region and how the U.S. can provide all assistance necessary to people who are working for change. I would be hesitant to say that this or that was caused directly by U.S. pressure. What President Mubarak did was bold; he surprised many by calling for a constitutional amendment before the next election, leading to multiparty elections. Now the world will watch and see how that unfolds, and hope it means real reform. We are not trying to target efforts on two or three places but rather taking each country and looking at where they are, what challenges they face, to what extent our programs meet the needs there.

The United States in recent years has put more emphasis on Palestinian reform than on restarting Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Is it possible to reform a Palestinian state that does not yet exist?

It's very possible and very important to do. The most effective time to address issues such as corruption and transparency, for example, is while the institutions of a state are being developed. Polls show that Palestinians want a judicial system that will set the rules of the game and protect the participants. We've seen with Abu Mazen and ministers such as Salaam Fayyad a dedication to doing that. The President has said that the Palestinian people need to be represented by a government that serves them well and lives up to the standards they deserve. Obviously reform has to include security issues as well to guarantee

the safety of the state of Israel. You cannot talk about the establishment of a Palestinian state, or two states living side by side in peace and security, without the necessary reforms.

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) has been criticized as being under-funded, but also for not expending its funds wisely. How do you see it?

Some of the criticism I've seen has been based on faulty information or misimpressions about how the MEPI money is expended or where it goes. You can't judge MEPI as being under-funded if you look at it in combination with our bilateral aid programs. It's also important to look at the idea behind the Partnership Initiative, which was really to reach out at a grassroots level to fund democratization projects and small-scale economic reform and assistance projects. At the end of the day, promoting democracy is not about how much money you have to spend. It doesn't matter how much you have to spend if the will isn't there for change. MEPI has been effective at helping to train people as they participate in their own political processes, helping to bring reformers together, sending a signal that the United States government is going to put money behind these activities. It was MEPI grants recently that were the first grants we signed in Egypt with NGOs directly. The shape of MEPI will evolve as well, according to developments in the region.

What about suggestions that the Initiative would be more effective if it were a non-governmental organization akin to the Asia Foundation?

There is an important role for a foundation to play. I wouldn't want the U.S. government to be in a position where it didn't have any money to spend on these programs directly. It is very important for us to be able to say—for example to women across the region—“we're inspired by your courage and we want to help you,” and then to have the resources to put behind those discussions. But I think the idea of a foundation is an excellent one, and there are a lot of things a foundation could do that the U.S. government cannot do. In many instances it's easier for NGOs to take money from a foundation. We are looking now at how such a foundation might best be structured.

Might most MEPI funding eventually go through a foundation?

We've looked at the scale of other foundations to see what level of annual assistance is necessary to make this work. It would probably make sense to try to have contributions to the foundation from European governments, Arab governments, and Arab individuals as well. I do think it is important for the U.S. government to retain enough money to fund programs quickly and directly, so I would probably not advocate taking all the money out of the U.S. government to put it into a foundation.

What is the function of the Broader Middle East Initiative announced at the 2004 G-8 summit and how does it relate to MEPI?

The easiest way to understand it is that MEPI is our bilateral assistance fund, the money we allocate directly for democracy, economic reform, education, and women's empowerment in the region. The Broader Middle East Initiative is a multilateral effort, a way to channel and signify multilateral support for change across this region and a way to come together and talk about these issues.

Any other points you would like to make to *Bulletin* readers?

We always welcome input and ideas, and if people who are reading the *Bulletin* have ideas about interesting projects or about how we can accomplish our mission more effectively, we would welcome those. There is contact information on the MEPI website (<http://mepi.state.gov/mepi/>). We really are

sincere about how important the advance in freedom is. It's obviously a shift in U.S. policy from the last 60 years and one we didn't make lightly, but we are absolutely committed to standing with people fighting for freedom.

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Europe and Reform: Barcelona Now More than Ever

Álvaro Vasconcelos

Ten years after the 1995 signature of the Barcelona Declaration (which established a European-Mediterranean partnership for peace, stability, prosperity, human development, and cultural exchange), Mediterranean issues are at the heart of the international agenda. Despite the continued relevance of the Barcelona process, its effectiveness has been rather harshly assessed. The “Barcelona Plus” report (click [here](#) for the full text) released in March shows that the causal and sequential links between economic and political liberalization have failed to materialize, except in a few countries such as Morocco. Progress so far in human development has been neither uniform nor sufficient to respond to the grave social problems of the region. In addition there have been anxieties about the true nature of European attitudes toward political change in a number of countries.

Despite disappointments with results so far, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) methodology—political, economic and social inclusion—remains the best way to support wide ranging reform processes in the region. For the Barcelona process to remain relevant, however, it must recognize that political reform and economic development are mutually sustaining and must be pursued in tandem, as one without the other loses momentum. In short, economic liberalization is not a substitute for policies designed to encourage democratic development. It is, rather, a necessary component of a holistic approach to change.

Paradoxically, the Barcelona process is indispensable now because of, rather than despite, new U.S. initiatives towards the region. On the one hand, U.S. initiatives have placed political reform squarely on the international agenda, and Southern states and civil societies are debating and engaging with reform agendas on an unprecedented scale. On the other, the war in Iraq generated great hostility towards what is viewed as democratic interventionism. This duality—the desire for reform accompanied by resistance to external imposition—means that the EMP is in a unique position to promote reform, given its case-by-case approach and conviction that the desire for reform and reform initiatives themselves must arise from the societies in question.

The EMP must now consider seriously the commitment of Barcelona signatories to “develop the rule of law and democracy in their political systems.” The ultimate goal must be the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States. If such a Community is to emerge, the EU and its southern partners must first accept that non-violent political Islam is an actor that cannot be sidelined. In fact, it is impossible to undertake a successful transition away from authoritarian rule, and even less to promote successful democratization, if political forces that represent roughly 20 to 30 percent of the popular vote in some countries are sidelined. It is becoming much easier to argue this point, given that countries like Morocco or Jordan have successfully allowed Islamic parties to participate in political reform. It is also essential to ensure that governments, as well as civil society organizations, are involved and that any steps towards reform are supported; this is precisely one of the areas of EMP best practices that must be deepened so as to create the foundations for Barcelona Plus.

Equally important for the future success of the Barcelona Process is a change in attitude towards immigrants from North Africa and their descendants. They cannot be viewed as a problem, but rather as a golden opportunity to forge strong reform ties between Europe and the southern Mediterranean. Immigrant communities and their organizations can play a central role in boosting and legitimating political and economic reform processes in their countries of origin.

The EU's new Neighborhood Policy for the countries of the southern Mediterranean and Eastern Europe offers these countries a stake in the European Single Market and its four freedoms (in movement of goods, persons, capital, and services). The Neighborhood Policy points in the right direction in that it emphasizes differentiation among countries and promotes country-specific action plans that include mechanisms to assess progress. The risk, however, is that this bilateral approach will weaken the regional focus of the Barcelona process. The two can be reconciled by integrating the aims of the Neighborhood Policy into the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, and setting different targets for Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean neighbors. For the former, the end-goal is the Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States, whereas for the latter it is European integration.

Announcing the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States would help make sense of the different initiatives that different actors, including the United States, have adopted to deal with the challenge of political reform in the region. But for this to be the case the U.S. administration must accept the central place of the Barcelona process, its methodology of engagement with and inclusion of the South, and of the Barcelona institutions, as the ideal framework to support the process of political and economic reform in the southern Mediterranean.

Álvaro Vasconcelos is Director of the Instituto de Estudos Estrategicos e Internacionais in Lisbon and Coordinator of the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission Secretariat.

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Democracy and the Palestine Issue: A Lesson from Tunisia

Khaled Hroub

Tunisians took to the streets in February protesting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's scheduled visit to their country in November 2005 to attend the World Information Summit. Inviting Sharon, seen as a war criminal by many Tunisians and other Arabs, was an undemocratic decision by the Tunisian regime exercised against the popular will of the Tunisian people. By taking this decision, the regime hoped to minimize U.S. pressure and criticism of the Tunisian presidential election last October. Through a combination of draconian security measures and scandalous constitutional amendments, President Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali won the elections by more than 95 percent of the vote, thus continuing his unbroken rule since 1987. Other Arabs—among them Egyptians, Moroccans, Jordanians, Omanis, and Mauritians—also protest frequently against the normalization of relations with Israel adopted by their governments in order to appease the United States.

The United States does not see normalization, which tops the list of issues about which it puts pressures on Arab governments, as an unpopular dictate imposed on people. From the perspective of the current U.S. administration, linking the two seemingly separate issues of democracy in the Arab world and Palestine/Israel is polemical and baseless. In fact, it is not. They are intimately linked and have a profound impact on each other. An unsolved Palestine question is a major source of distraction from the

course of promoting democracy in the region. The traditional Arab view that solving the Palestine question is a prerequisite for democracy in Arab countries, even in places as far from Palestine as Tunis, Rabat, Muscat, and Nouakchott, is still as widely shared as ever. While U.S. pressure on Arab regimes to reform will make limited inroads, a real shift toward democracy is contingent on the full and active support of Arab populations. So long as no just solution is reached on the Palestine question, U.S. policies—including democracy promotion—will continue to be seen as insincere and hypocritical.

Among the reasons for Arab scepticism about U.S. democracy promotion is the fact that the policy is riddled with paradoxes. First, there is the standard and well-known trade-off of concern about internal reform in favor of guaranteeing certain U.S. strategic interests, such as cooperation in the so-called war on terror. Then there is the unanswered question regarding how the United States would view the prospective victory of Islamist movements in democratic elections if they were conducted freely and fairly. There is also the contradictory U.S. position concerning the rise of relatively free and democratic Arab media (such as Al Jazeera), with the United States pressing governments to silence what is seen by many to be almost the only active democratic forum in the region. Another paradox is the indirect discrediting and harming of indigenous Arab democracy activists, who are increasingly perceived as American proxies. Most damaging of all is unqualified U.S. support of Israel despite its occupation of Palestinian lands.

Military occupation of any people, such as Israeli military rule over the Palestinians, is the most flagrant mode of authoritarianism and violates the basic notions of democracy. Leaving this disastrous case unresolved while focusing on reform in Arab countries, allegedly because of the urgent need for democracy, is hypocritical. Moreover, putting pressure on the very same Arab countries to open relations with an uncompromising Israel—undemocratically and against the will of their people—is not only damaging to any internal democratisation process but exposes the emptiness of the entire endeavor.

Arab regimes are smart enough to see that they can still use normalization steps with Israel to relieve U.S. pressure for democratization. Thus, unless the United States relocates resolving the Palestine/Israel question to the top of its agenda, the end result of U.S. democracy policy will be at best the cloning and repackaging of the Jordanian and Moroccan models of democracy. In other words, mere cosmetic reform measures will continue to clothe essentially authoritarian modes of rule.

Khaled Hroub is director of the Cambridge Arab Media Project and author of “ Hamas: Political Thought and Practice ” (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000).

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Lebanon: Elections Endangered

Walid Choucair

Translated from Arabic by Julia Choucair; click [here](#) for the Arabic original.

With the departure of Syrian troops from northern Lebanon and the approaching withdrawal from the rest of the country by April 27, the electoral balance of power in Lebanon has radically changed in advance of elections scheduled to be held by May 31. Even before the February assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri, the extension of President Emile Lahoud's term in September 2004 had generated widespread opposition and launched new dynamics in the Lebanese political scene. Hariri's

assassination multiplied this sentiment, widening the opposition's popular base.

The prevailing belief in Lebanon is that the elimination of Hariri, irrespective of who was responsible, was aimed at preventing him from filling the political void left by an eventual Syrian withdrawal. Hariri's unique position made him most able to form a bridge between Lebanese opponents—he had large support from Sunnis and other Lebanese, played a prominent role in the Arab world, and had international connections. In short, Hariri and his allies were the most capable of restoring normalcy to Lebanese political life and replacing the artificial powers sustained by Syria. The opposition's slogan “we want to know the truth” (in reference to the assassination) expresses the public's rejection of politics imposed by force in Lebanon through imprisonment, exile, and assassination. The opposition is demanding the truth in order to deprive those responsible of any popular support, particularly after the government has been accused of hindering investigations.

Currently, there is a sense in Lebanon that the elections are endangered because the escalating political struggle has taken precedence, with the opposition pushing for the truth about the assassination and for the resignation of security leaders in Lebanon. The opposition's choice of the street as the forum for this confrontation has delayed discussions about the electoral law that was referred to parliament before the assassination. This leaves little time for legal arrangements for the elections. No party, however, Lebanese or international, dares suggest postponing the elections and thus assuming the responsibility in the eyes of the public. The pro-Syrian Lebanese authorities, however, have made an implicit decision to delay elections, as expressed by some pro-Syria ministers, who have asked unabashedly why they should surrender power to the opposition via elections without exacting a price.

While the country was mourning Hariri's death, Syria's supporters ignored the political consequences of the event and rushed to devise an electoral law. Recently pro-Syrian officials have departed from their original proposal to divide the country into small electoral districts (qadas). Instead, they have suggested using the Taif agreement, accepted by all parties since it ended the civil war in 1989, which created larger districts corresponding to the governorates (muhafazat). Opinion polls show that if this system were used coupled with proportional representation instead of majority rule, the opposition would still win in many areas. Based on these calculations, Damascus began pressing its allies to extend the current parliament's term and delay elections for one year in the hope of a change in the balance of power. This plan was abandoned, however, due to international and Arab pressure on Syria as well as Hezbollah's taking care not to depart too far from the popular will by aligning itself too closely with Syria. Currently, the authorities are trying to fleece the opposition—authorities promise to postpone elections for no more than three to six months if the opposition agrees not to contest the re-election of certain key supporters of Syria.

For its part, the opposition faces the challenge of designating Sunni candidates in Beirut, the north, Mt. Lebanon, the Beqa, and the south. Hariri was unrivaled among Sunnis and intended to run candidates in all regions, a departure from previous elections where he left room for other candidates by Syrian demand. Although his assassination increased popular support for his party, the lack of a figure with Hariri's stature will complicate the task of uniting various forces, unless the Hariri family and his party's leaders can devise an electoral equation to fill the void. Another issue for the opposition is the intensifying competition among Christian forces. Figures such as General Michael Aoun, the Lebanese Forces, and traditional and family leaders are eager to fill the gap left in Christian areas by the loss of influence of pro-Syria candidates.

Walid Choucair is Beirut Bureau Chief for Al Hayat newspaper.

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Iraq: The Long Road to a Government

Musab Alkateeb

Ten weeks after the January 30 elections, Iraqis have chosen a Kurdish president, Shiite and Sunni vice presidents, a Sunni speaker and Shiite deputy speaker of parliament, and now a Shiite prime minister. Why has it taken so long to form the new government?

The vote counting process and the parties' right to contest results and seek recounts consumed the first two weeks after the election. As early results were leaked to the press, Iraqis rejoiced in their first act of collective citizenship to set Iraq's democracy on a sound footing—or so they thought.

The last two weeks of February were characterized by behind-the-scenes squabbling and political bargaining among the member coalitions comprising the Shiite-dominated United Iraqi Alliance (UIA). This internal horse-trading naturally centered on which positions within the new government would be offered and to whom. UIA leaders also traveled to Kurdistan for detailed talks beginning in early March, negotiations that lasted approximately a month.

The process of government formation has been guided—and also complicated—by the Transitional Administration Law (TAL), which requires a two-thirds majority in the elected assembly to form a government. Shiite Ayatollah Sistani tacitly approved the TAL, despite his objection to the provision giving Kurds an effective veto. Sistani knew that the political reality of Iraq would not allow for anything but a power-sharing arrangement among the major ethnic groups. Had the UIA formed a Shiite-only government based on a simple majority, the fears of Iraq's Arab neighbors would have been quickly realized, dooming the government from the start.

Due to the TAL, the Kurds now enjoy a position on the Iraqi political landscape far beyond their numbers. The Kurds persuaded U.S. officials that they were the secular antidote to a Shiite-dominated Iraq, thereby clearing the way to further Kurdish territorial and political ambitions at a time when Iraq is at its weakest. The Kurdish leadership cemented its claim to oil-rich Kirkuk by resettling Kurdish refugees in and around Kirkuk's public places such as soccer stadiums, mosques, and refugee camps. In addition to their participation in Iraq's interim governments to date, the Kurds maintain a separate government in Iraq's northern provinces, which makes no effort to coordinate its actions or policies with the central government. Kurds also maintain armed forces (Peshmerga) that are distinct and separate from the Iraqi armed forces, despite de facto control by the Kurds over the Ministry of Defense.

In contrast to the Kurds, Sunni Arabs have managed poorly their role in the politics of post-war Iraq. Sunni politicians and population have now painfully realized the cost of their abstinence from the election process, as shown by a recent demonstration in the Sunni stronghold of Tikrit demanding (in vain) the appointment of independent Sunni MP Mishaan Al Jibouri as speaker of the National Assembly.

The dearth of Sunni representatives in the National Assembly complicated the eventual choice of Hashem Al Hassani as speaker. There are 17 Sunni representatives in all, six of whom are part of the UIA. While Sunni politicians jostled for the speaker position, political developments in the wider Sunni populations were afoot. It is now clear that Sunni leadership is split into two main camps, one wishing to take an active role in Iraqi politics and another making its involvement conditional upon the withdrawal of U.S. troops and thereby espousing the methods of the insurgency. This rift may represent a positive

trend among some of Iraq 's Sunni Arabs, as they break with those who actively seek to destroy Iraq 's nascent democracy.

After examining why it has taken so long to form a government, one can now see ongoing implications for Iraqi politics. U.S. officials have made it clear that an Islamist Iraq is no reward for the United States' sacrifice, a position that ironically may cause irreversible harm to the creation of the very Iraqi democracy for which hundreds of Americans gave their lives. The same factors, including the TAL, that complicated government formation by seeking to avoid domination of Iraqi politics by the Shiite majority now cast a long shadow over the process of writing an Iraqi constitution, due to begin once Iraqis clear the next hurdle of cabinet formation.

Musab Alkateeb is a former Deputy Minister of Trade in the Interim Iraqi Government.

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News and Views

Jordan: New Cabinet and Party Reform

A new Jordanian cabinet was sworn in on April 7, the twelfth cabinet change since King Abdullah ascended the throne in February 1999. Composed of economic reformers and young technocrats close to the king, the cabinet is charged with speeding up reform. In the [Letter of Designation](#), King Abdullah called on the new Prime Minister Adnan Badran to accelerate the pace of reforms and institutionalize the political, economic, and social reform process. The 26-member cabinet includes 12 ministers from the previous government. Click [here](#) for a full list of ministers.

The new cabinet is already facing problems with the 110-member lower house of parliament. Thirty-four members signed a statement of dissatisfaction with the cabinet, which they believe was formed without their advice and does not adequately represent certain regions of the country. According to the Jordanian constitution, the new cabinet must seek parliamentary approval for its statement of policy within a month of being formed, unless parliament is out of session or disbanded.

Former minister of political development Munzer Sharaa proposed an amendment to the 1992 political parties law on March 21. The law, which has not yet been submitted to parliament, requires political parties to have a minimum of 200 founding members (currently only 50 are needed) and offers parties financial allocations from the state budget, the amount of which depends on the percentage of women and youth in the party. A statement by the Higher Committee of Coordination for Opposition Parties—made up of fifteen parties—rejected the proposal and accused the government of attempting to control and undermine political parties in the wake of “recent government attacks on professional associations.” Opposition parties argue that the key to real democratic reform and increased popular participation is a new electoral law based on proportional representation. Jordanian officials have said repeatedly that the core of political reform will be new election and political party laws before the 2007 legislative elections.

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Egypt: Human Rights Report, Continuing Demonstrations and Arrests

Egypt's National Council on Human Rights, headed by former foreign minister Boutros Boutros Ghali since it was constituted in January 2004, sent its first annual report on human rights conditions in Egypt to President Mubarak and the heads of the upper and lower houses of parliament on April 10. The 358-page document, the first of its kind in Egypt, reportedly makes a clear recommendation to lift the State of Emergency in place continuously since 1981 and expresses concern about torture in prisons, which is described in detail. The report was not available to the public as of this writing.

Cairo—and recently other Egyptian cities—continue to see frequent anti-government protests by liberal and Islamist groups. The Muslim Brotherhood rallied as many as 3,000 supporters for demonstrations on March 27 in Cairo and hundreds on April 10 in Cairo and Alexandria, while the liberal Kifaya (“Enough”) movement held smaller protests in Cairo, Mansoura, and Alexandria on March 30. Twenty-five Kifaya supporters were arrested during the demonstrations.

Egyptian security forces have recently arrested more than 90 members or supporters of the banned Muslim Brotherhood. On March 26, 49 men were arrested in various raids for being “in possession of books and publications opposed to the system of government” and for “disturbing security.” On March 27, riot police prohibited the group from holding a demonstration calling for political reform and 50 protesters were arrested for refusing to disperse. The Brotherhood has joined opposition parties in calling for political reform and recently accused the government of rigging elections for the Bar Association. Although the Muslim Brotherhood is illegal in Egypt, the government tolerates a limited degree of Brotherhood participation in elections and other political activities, but also carries out regular campaigns.

Opposition politician Ayman Nour, who has declared his intention to run for the presidential elections in September, has been charged with falsifying signatures on documents under which his Al Ghad (“Tomorrow”) Party was registered. Nour, who was arrested January 29 and released on bail March 12, will stand trial beginning June 28 with six other members of Al Ghad. He has denied the charges and said the arrest was meant to silence his party.

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Morocco: Political Party Law to be Debated

After extensive debate between the Ministry of Interior and political parties, the cabinet approved a draft law on political parties on March 17. The draft law tightens controls on party registration and specifies that parties may not have a religious, linguistic, ethnic, or regional basis. According to the Ministry, the legislation would improve parties' internal management, make it easier for them to receive public funding, and diversify their membership by establishing quotas for women and youth. Detractors are concerned about provisions that would ban religious, racial, regional, socio-professional, or linguistic references in party platforms.

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Kuwait: Debate on Women's Rights Continues

Debate **continues** in Kuwait over a government-sponsored bill that would amend the electoral law to grant women suffrage and the right to run for office. Parliament's interior and defense committee is discussing the women's bill in addition to two other election reform bills that would lower the voting age from 21 to 18 and grant voting rights to 50,000 servicemen in the defense and interior ministries. The bill needs 33 of 65 votes to pass. Parliament voted down women's rights legislation twice in 1999.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs issued a fatwa (religious opinion) on March 19 stating that “a decision by the ruler should end disputes on matters” upon which there is no religious consensus. The government has announced that if the law to allow women to run in elections is not passed, it will appoint women to municipal posts.

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Palestine: Political Reform Developments

After almost three years of dialogue under Egyptian auspices, representatives from PLO and Islamist factions have agreed to integrate Hamas and Islamic Jihad into the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The March 17 Cairo Declaration (click [here](#) for the full text) promises “total reform in all areas...supporting the democratic process in its various aspects and holding local and legislative elections in their determined time according to an election law to be agreed upon.” It recommends that Palestinian Legislative Council elections in July be held under a mixed system in which half the seats are determined by districts and half by proportional representation.

The Central Elections Commission gained a new mandate on April 4 to oversee the Palestinian Legislative Council elections scheduled for July 17. Three new commissioners were added (click [here](#) for the full list). The commission has stated it needs three months to prepare for the elections, but the electoral law for legislative elections has not yet been passed. If parliament does not pass it within two weeks, the elections may be delayed.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has appointed a commission in charge of judicial reform. The “Steering Committee for the Development of the Judiciary and Justice” will be in charge of making improvements to the 2002 Judicial Authority Law to ensure it can be implemented. The 2002 law gave the Palestinian judiciary a degree of autonomy and jurisdiction that other Arab judiciaries lack, but implementation of the law has been slow due to continued conflicts and inefficiency between the judiciary and other bodies.

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Bahrain: Opposition-Government Tensions

On March 26, tens of thousands of demonstrators participated in a rally calling for constitutional reform organized by the Al Wafaq National Islamic Society (a Shiite opposition group) along with the left-wing National Democratic Action Society, the pan-Arabist National Democratic Society, and the Islamic Action Society (another Shiite group). Demonstrators called for abolishing amendments that give the upper house of parliament as much power as the elected chamber, as well as for a constitution ratified by elected representatives to replace the current charter, which was approved by royal decree in 2002. According to the 1989 Societies Law, the Al Wafaq society may face a 45-day closure for defying the Ministry of Interior's ban of the rally.

The government also has arrested several political activists. On February 27 and 28, authorities arrested three men for running an online discussion forum that posted comments critical of the regime on charges of “defamation ... inciting hatred against the regime and spreading rumors and lies that could cause disorder.” They were released on March 14 after their website, Bahrainonline.org, was blocked. On March 9, three members of a recently formed Committee of the Unemployed were also arrested for distributing leaflets calling for protests against unemployment.

Observers are concerned these tensions could escalate into an outbreak of political and socioeconomic conflict between the majority Shiite population and the minority ruling Sunnis. Unemployment—officially estimated at 15 percent although observers believe it is higher—is concentrated in the Shiite community, and most of the protestors are Shiite.

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Arab Human Development Report

The third Arab Human Development Report, authored by prominent Arab intellectuals and released by the U.N. Development Program in Amman on April 5, urges more freedom and political reform across the region. It warns that the concentration of power in the hands of the executive has created a “black hole” in Arab political life and that unless Arab governments begin to implement democratic reforms—such as greater freedom of opinion, freely elected legislatures, an end to discrimination, and truly independent judiciaries—they will face internal conflict or reforms imposed by outside powers. The report criticizes the United States for contributing to an international context that hampers progress in the region through its policy toward Israel, its actions in Iraq, and its security measures that affect Arabs. Click [here](#) for the executive summary and other information about the report, and click [here](#) to access the full document.

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Arab League Summit

Arab leaders meeting at the March 22-23, 2005 summit in Algiers did not present any new ideas regarding political reform or reform of the Arab League, returning instead to discussion of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In regard to political reform, the Algiers declaration pledges leaders to “continue the path towards development and modernization in the Arab nation in order to consolidate democratic practice; broaden political participation; reaffirm attachment to the values of citizenship and to democratic culture; improve human rights; give opportunities to civil society; and empower women's participation in all realms of public life.” Regarding League reform, the leaders agreed to “continue working” towards the measures introduced at last year's Tunis summit by Secretary General Amr Moussa. These include creating an Arab parliament (an unelected consultative body for the league), a security council, a court of justice, and changing voting procedures. (To read the declaration in Arabic as published in *Asharq al Awsat* on March 24, click [here](#).)

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Second Alexandria Conference

A year after the inaugural conference on Arab reform and the much-debated [Alexandria Declaration](#) (click [here](#) for Arabic), civil society activists, journalists, and officials from across the Arab world gathered in Alexandria, Egypt on March 13-15, 2005 for the second Arab Reform Conference. Participants at the conference, which focused on “Successful Models and Projects of Civil Society Organizations,” discussed the work of various Arab civil society associations as well as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's recent decision to allow multi-candidate presidential elections. In his speech inaugurating the conference, Mubarak spoke of his commitment to pursue reform and promised that Egypt would soon witness “new horizons for civil society and more constitutional changes.” For more information in Arabic about the conference, click [here](#).

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Views from the Arab Media

Arab satellite TV networks featured live discussions about the latest developments in the region.

On Al Jazeera 's political debate show, “ [Min Washington](#) ” (From Washington), presenter Hafez Al Mirazi discussed the State Department's annual Report on Human Rights Practices with Michael Kozak, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. The March 3 program also featured a debate among Amr Hamzawy, Najib Ghadbian, and Fawaz Gerges about how successful U.S. reform promotion in the region has been.

On another Al Jazeera show, “ [Akthar Min Rai](#) ” (More than One Opinion), host Sami Haddad brought together on March 18 Palestinian politicians to discuss the future of Hamas. The discussion focused on the reasons for Hamas's participation in the elections, the possibility of Hamas becoming a main political force, and the future of Fatah in light of Hamas's popularity.

An April 7 [episode](#) of “Abr Al Muhit” (Across the Ocean), a weekly political debate show presented by Hisham Melhem on Al Arabiyya, discussed the situation in Iraq and the political crisis in Lebanon. The show brought together Robert Malley (former National Security Council official), Lebanese lawyer Chibli Mallat, and journalists Said Erekat (*Al Quds* newspaper) and Salama Nemat (*Al Hayat* newspaper).

Many Arab newspapers commented on the Arab Human Development Report released by the UN Development Program on April 5. An April 6 editorial in the UAE daily *Al Khaleej* praises the report and argues that it should serve as an incentive for adopting real reform in Arab countries. It urges Arab leaders to stop delaying the reform process before it is too late. Writing in the London-based pan-Arab *Al Hayat* on April 7, Abdul Wahhab Bedorkhan [discusses](#) the controversy surrounding the report and argues that it is not as revolutionary as it has been made to be. It is a working plan with concrete steps to achieve real constitutional and legislative reform in the region. In an [opinion piece](#) in Lebanon's *Al Safir*, Sati' Nour Al Din criticizes the report for falling into the trap of generalizations it should have avoided, mainly treating the Arab world as a single bloc with the same problems needing a common solution.

In an open [letter](#) to President George Bush published in *Al Hayat* on April 7, Jihad Al Khazen asserts he agrees with him on the need for freedom and democracy in the region but warns him against allying with “corrupt alternatives” from so-called opposition movements to replace the current regimes. He also hopes that the democracy being prescribed for the Arab world is better than the Iraqi case, where “there is no democracy but there is fear and hate.”

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Upcoming Events

- 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)
- Palestinian Legislative Council elections, July 17

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Read On

The Economist Intelligence Unit examines prospects for democratic reform in 20 Middle East countries in “[The Dynamics of Democracy in the Middle East](#)” (London : The Economist Intelligence Unit, March 2005). The report concludes the while “something is certainly stirring in the Middle East, the resilience of the existing state structures should not be underestimated.”

A new Carnegie Policy Outlook by Amr Hamzawy, “[Understanding Arab Political Reality: One Lens Is Not Enough](#),” argues that while political changes are sweeping across the Middle East, it would be wrong to oversimplify developments as a one-dimensional “Arab Spring” (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2005).

A new report by the International Crisis Group “[Syria After Lebanon, Lebanon After Syria](#)” (Middle East Report No. 39, April 12, 2005) discusses the prospect of Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. It argues that ensuring a peaceful and successful transition requires insulating Lebanon from wider regional dynamics. The United States must avoid temptations to use the situation to achieve its larger regional objectives and should focus on the goal of a sovereign, stable Lebanon.

In “Know Thy Enemy: Hizbollah, “Terrorism” and the Politics of Perception,” Mona Harb and Reinoud Leenders suggest that any analysis of the prospect of Hizbollah's transformation away from armed resistance should be placed in the context of its hegemony among the Shiites of Lebanon and of the tools used to acquire and sustain its status (*Third World Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1, March 2005, 173-97).

Robert Springborg comments on President Hosni Mubarak's February 26 announcement of support for multiparty presidential elections in “[Multiple Candidate Elections in Egypt: Diverting Pressure for Democracy](#)” (Madrid : Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), March 2005). He argues that the proposal is a politically astute move by Mubarak to expose the weakness, disunity and lack of preparedness of the opposition and the centrality of his own person to the political system.

Several new publications analyze the current situation in Iraq:

- A new report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) argues that Iran 's influence in Iraq has been one of the most discussed but least understood aspects of the post-war situation. “[Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?](#)” (International Crisis Group, Middle East Report no. 38, March 21, 2005) finds that the evidence of destabilizing Iranian intervention is far less extensive and clear than is alleged by Washington, Arab leaders, and prominent Iraqi officials. To maximize the chance that Iraq emerges successfully from its political transition, it will be critical for Tehran and Baghdad to work together on common security issues, and for the United States to prevent a further deterioration of its relations with Iran.
- In “The Continuing Crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan” (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring 2005, 122-33), Michael M. Gunter and M. Hakan Yavuz analyze possible scenarios for the Kurdish future in Iraq. They argue that it will be very difficult for Iraqi Kurds to obtain the type of federalism that will satisfy their demands—a multi-national or ethnic federal system which would enable them to protect their rights—because Arabs oppose it and Iraq lacks a democratic culture that would make actual federalism work. The article also analyzes the conditions under which the Iraqi Kurds might move toward independence.

- Over the course of 2005, the U.S. should plan a strategy of withdrawal from Iraq as the best choice among an unattractive set of options, argues Barry Rubin in “[Reality Bites: The Impending Logic of Withdrawal from Iraq](#)” (*The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2, Spring 2005, 67-80). There is little reason to expect that a peacefully negotiated resolution of Iraq's power struggle is going to end the violence in the near future or create a situation in which U.S. troops are going to be welcome indefinitely.
- According to Daniel Byman, the least bad and most realistic option for the United States in Iraq is a drawdown to a far smaller force with a more limited mission. Although it leaves little hope for a true victory, such an option would enable the United States to maintain some influence in Iraq and would diminish the strain on the military and the budget (“[Five Bad Options for Iraq](#),” *Survival*, vol. 47, no. 1, Spring 2005, 7-32).

Other recent publications focus on the U.S. role in promoting democratic reform in the region:

- Ronald D. Asmus, Larry Diamond, Mark Leonard, and Michael McFaul lay out the framework for a transatlantic strategy to promote democratic development in the broader Middle East based on three pillars: strengthening forces for democratic change and stable liberal democratic politics within Middle Eastern societies; working to create a more secure regional foreign policy context that facilitates democratic transformation; and better coordination among the United States, Europe, and partners in the region. (“[A Transatlantic Strategy to Promote Democratic Development in the Broader Middle East](#),” *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2, Spring 2005, 7-21).
- *Middle East Policy* published an edited compilation, “Evaluating the Bush Menu for Change in the Middle East ” featuring contributions by scholars at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting. Articles by Augustus Richard Norton, Louis J. Cantori, Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, Judith S. Yaphe, Michael C. Hudson, and Eric Davis examine the effects of the U.S. strategy in the region (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring 2005, 97-121).

The Center Defense Information inaugurated April 12 a new weekly electronic newsletter in Arabic about U.S. developments on Arab issues. Click [here](#) for more information about Taqrir Washington (Washington Report).

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