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Note from the Editor:

Please note that we have posted results from the Egyptian parliamentary elections as of November 17 under News and Views below.

—Michele Dunne

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Insights and Analysis

Jordan: Knives Out for the National Agenda

Marc Lynch

On October 22, Jordan's "reform czar" Marwan Muasher announced that the National Agenda, billed as a comprehensive road map to reform, would not be released until after Ramadan due to "printing and proofreading" problems. This minor debacle had been building for some time, with fierce pre-emptive attacks on the Agenda in the press and equivocation on the part of Prime Minister Adnan Badran about how binding the Agenda would be. By the end of October leading columnists were writing of the Agenda in the past tense, while Amman was abuzz with speculation about an impending change of government or dissolution of Parliament.

Work on the National Agenda began in February 2005 in response to international concerns and growing domestic frustrations over a sputtering economy and a stalled, repressive political status quo. After six years in power, King Abdullah II had little to show for his frequent speeches about reform. His tenure has been characterized by a steady decline in freedoms: a raft of repressive temporary laws; nearly two years without a parliament (2001-2003); and tighter controls on the media and public assembly. Public opinion polls reveal widespread public alienation, with 80 percent responding to one survey that they did not feel safe criticizing the government in public. In late 2004, matters took a turn for the worse, as Interior Minister Samir Habashneh's attempts to strip professional associations of their political role led to tense showdowns with demonstrators in the streets. Although the Bush administration maintained a careful public silence about Jordan's democratic failings in appreciation of its help in regional affairs, Abdullah faced criticism in the U.S. media over the kingdom's increasingly undemocratic image.

The king therefore charged the National Agenda Committee with developing a roadmap to reform all sectors of economic and political life. Abdullah summarily dismissed Prime Minister Faisal Al Fayez, charging his replacement Badran with implementing comprehensive reforms and giving National Agenda Committee head Muasher a dominant role in Badran's government. Badran faced unprecedented parliamentary resistance, however, with a bloc of conservative members of parliament joining the traditional opposition in a threat to deny him a vote of confidence. Badran ultimately won a confidence vote only after months of political jockeying and sacrificing one of his key ministers, controversial Finance Minister Bassam Awadallah. The Palace's inability to secure Badran's immediate confirmation revealed widespread resistance to the king's vision of reform, prompting him to unleash a withering attack on the entire political class in an extraordinary address. With these wounds still fresh, the knives were out for the National Agenda regardless of its contents.

While the Agenda has not yet been published as of this writing, its main contours have become clear in a number of press conferences, speeches, and press accounts. The Agenda would offer a ten-year plan for comprehensive reform in eight sectors—education, infrastructure, employment, social welfare, finances, the judiciary, investment, and political development. Among worthy, if potentially unrealistic, goals were universal health coverage by 2012, a major overhaul of the tax system, increased spending on scientific research, and a significant cut in unemployment through the creation of 600,000 new jobs. Ideas for political reform are far less developed and more controversial. Most damagingly, the Agenda's drafters failed to achieve consensus on a new electoral system, instead offering a number of possible solutions—including the principle of a mixed system incorporating elements of proportional representation—and leaving it to the government to decide.

The Agenda has failed to spark a constructive national debate or to build a public consensus for its vision of reform. The proposal to end compulsory membership in the Journalists Association infuriated the media, turning many opinion makers against it before its release. Conservatives resent the Agenda's attack on entrenched privileges; parliament resents its move to change the electoral system; the opposition fears that it will be used to the government's benefit; liberals worry that it will sacrifice political reforms; and the professional associations fear that it will challenge their political role. In addition, ethnic Jordanian nationalists fanned fears that the Agenda would transform the identity of the state, empowering Palestinians and even paving the way to Jordanian rule of the West Bank.

Six years of unfulfilled promises have cast serious doubts on King Abdullah's commitment to democracy. If the National Agenda fails to produce real political reform, as appears increasingly likely, these doubts will multiply. This would pose a serious challenge to the Bush administration, which in public has largely praised Jordan's reform efforts. If it continues to do so even in the event of the National Agenda's failure, this would likely alleviate any sense of urgency on the part of the King. It would also prove to many Arab observers that Washington's talk of breaking with past support for cooperative authoritarian rulers was indeed only talk.

*Marc Lynch is a professor of political science at Williams College and author of *Voices of the New Arab Public* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming December 2005).*

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Gaza: Disengagement's Harsh Realities

Mkhaimar Abusada

In the few weeks that have passed since Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, the urgent challenges facing President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) have become clear but whether Abbas will succeed has not. The stakes are high. The PA's ability to impose law and order and the ruling Fatah party's ability to unify and compete effectively in upcoming legislative elections will not only determine the shape of the future Palestinian political system but also whether or not Palestinians will descend further into a civil war.

The most urgent task facing President Abbas is containing lawlessness in Gaza, where murder, kidnapping, and extortion have reached new heights. There have reportedly been 75 kidnappings since the Israeli withdrawal. Armed individuals resort to kidnapping to get jobs, free family members from prison, and exact revenge. Often they belong to local gangs or even to the militias of large clans.

Gazans hope that the lawlessness, infighting, and corruption plaguing them will soon be addressed due the recent return of Gaza's strongman Muhammad Dahlan (former head of Preventive Security and now Minister of Civil Affairs), who had been away for a month for medical reasons. Dahlan said upon his arrival that it was time for Fatah to control its arms, end the chaos in Gaza, and focus on winning the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections slated for January 2006.

Although the agenda Dahlan articulated makes sense, how it might be accomplished remains unclear. President Abbas faces a critical dilemma: he fears that the use of force to stamp out lawlessness would lead to a civil war, but without law and order it is doubtful that elections can be held, thereby complicating the already tense relationship between the PA and Hamas.

Meanwhile the crisis inside Fatah rages on. Lacking a charismatic leader and with its public image tarnished by corruption and incompetence, Fatah has lost popularity among Palestinians steadily over the past decade. In light of Hamas's impressive victories in recent municipal elections in the West Bank and Gaza, Fatah leaders are justifiably worried about the possibility of a crushing defeat in the PLC elections.

Citing the lack of accountability and democracy within the party, over 240 Fatah activists in Gaza resigned recently while Fatah was preparing to hold primaries for the elections. "We have spent the last ten years trying to improve conditions in Fatah," said a letter to Abbas from the activists, who represent a young guard that has engaged in an ongoing power struggle with the party's veteran leaders. The activists' withdrawal forced the postponement of Fatah primaries (now mandated for November 20) and constituted a severe blow to Abbas's efforts to unify the party in order to prevent a strong showing by Hamas in the elections.

Hamas is well aware of Fatah's disarray and opposes any postponement of the elections. The Islamic movement is playing its cards carefully and has shown a recent desire for calm. It has stressed in its public rhetoric that elections must be held in order to facilitate reform and fight corruption. Hamas is keeping an eye on public opinion, realizing that most Palestinians (nearly 80 percent according to a recent poll) support the cease-fire with Israel and do not want a return to violence. Moreover, it probably hopes not to alienate the United States, which apparently did not oppose Abbas's plan (reportedly discussed during his October 20 White House visit) to allow Hamas to become a legitimate political party in hopes of eventually disarming the movement.

Abbas thus faces a formidable series of political and security challenges. He has just launched a process to disarm militias working under Fatah and now must try to unify the party in preparation for January elections. If he succeeds in that, he must try to achieve through the elections a large enough majority in the PLC to support continuing disarmament and extending it to Hamas and other groups. The greatest test of Abbas' governing ability and capacity, however, will come after the January elections when he will have to try to translate his plans into actions in order to build stability in Gaza and press for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.

Mkhaimar Abusada teaches political science at Al Azhar University in Gaza. He has written numerous articles on Palestinian politics.

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United States: The Congress and Democracy Promotion

Mustapha Khalfi

The role of the Congress in shaping U.S. policy on democracy promotion in the Middle East is multifaceted. Not only does the Congress provide funding for democracy promotion, but it also helps formulate a strategic vision, monitors the administration's work, and recommends structural revisions in the administration to help achieve the goals set. Recent Congressional efforts, however, reinforce rather than redress critical flaws in the administration's approach to democracy promotion.

The Advance Democracy Act of 2005 is the most important bill to come out of the Congress on democracy promotion since the 1983 initiative to establish the National Endowment for Democracy. Initially introduced in March 2005 by Republican Senator John McCain and Congressman Frank Wolf with support from key Democrats, such as Senator Joseph Lieberman and Congressman Tom Lantos, the bill obtained greater significance when it was incorporated into the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for fiscal years 2006 and 2007 (H.R. 2601). The bill passed in the House of Representatives on July 20 by a vote of 351 to 78, and is still pending approval in the Senate. There have also been numerous other draft bills related to democracy promotion during 2005.

The Advance Democracy Act materialized in the context of changing U.S. rhetoric on democratization and the acknowledgment of U.S. shortcomings in democracy promotion. As such, the bill's introductory observation is that the continued lack of democracy in some countries is inconsistent with the universal values on which the United States is based and that this situation poses a national security threat to the United States and its friends.

The House International Relations Committee placed this initiative within the general goal of strengthening democracy promotion inside the Department of State. By using democracy promotion as a tool for furthering other U.S. foreign policy interests, however, the Congress has repeated the administration's errors. The Congress avoided this mistake in 1983 when it refused to place the Reagan administration's democracy programs within the United States Information Agency. Instead, it called for such programs to be administered by a non-governmental organization, leading to the establishment of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The Senate also passed a bill that no one involved in intelligence activities since 1963 should be employed in the NED to avoid any suspicion that the Endowment would be a front for the Central Intelligence Agency.

The current bill attempts to shape State Department democracy promotion efforts on both the structural and programmatic levels. On the structural level, it calls for a change in the title of the Undersecretary for Global Affairs to Undersecretary for Democracy and Global Affairs (Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made this change on July 29). It also calls for the establishment of an office within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to promote transitions to full democracy in countries that have been categorized as undemocratic. Second, it creates regional democracy hubs at U.S. missions abroad. Third, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research is tasked with documenting financial assets held by leaders of countries determined to be undemocratic or in transition. Fourth, it stipulates the establishment of a bipartisan Democracy Promotion and Human Rights Advisory Board, which would make democracy promotion one of the criteria on which Foreign Service officers are evaluated for purposes of promotion.

On the programmatic level, the initiative mandates that the Secretary of State prepare an annual report on democracy and calls for the establishment of a website for global democracy and human rights. As part of an outreach program in foreign countries, it encourages Chiefs of Mission to spend time in universities defending U.S. values and discussing policies that promote democracy. Linking democracy promotion to public diplomacy on behalf of U.S. goals, however, is a critical flaw in the initiative.

At first glance, the Advance Democracy Act of 2005 appears to be an improvement of the administration's policies because it emphasizes the need to formulate specific strategies for democracy promotion. But an overall assessment shows that it is burdened by some of the same shortcomings symptomatic of administration policy. Treating democracy promotion as a tool of U.S. foreign policy rather than as a goal of policy will lead to its getting lost amid other U.S. security, strategic, economic, and even ideological interests. Creating a structure analogous to the NED inside the State Department—which the Act funds at \$50 million for 2006 and \$60 million for 2007, not much below the \$80 million for 2006 authorized for the NED—will only compound such confusion.

Democracy promotion is a good in itself and should not be put at the service of other goals such as improving the U.S. image or gathering support for other U.S. policies. For this reason it is best pursued by organizations such as the NED rather than from within the State Department.

Mustapha Khalfi is a Moroccan journalist and Visiting Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He is a Fulbright/American Political Science Association Congressional fellow studying U.S. policy in the Middle East. This article was translated from Arabic by Julia Choucair.

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Libya: Status Report on the Paradigm Shift

Fred Abrahams

For three decades, human rights violations in Libya were committed under the rubric of “revolutionary defense.” The government and its extensive security apparatus imprisoned or “disappeared” critics who challenged the ideology of the 1969 revolution that overthrew the monarchy or of Colonel Muammar Qadhafi's system of Jamahariya, the “state of the masses.”

Since 2001—September 11 to be precise—that rubric has changed. The Libyan government has shifted away from revolutionary rhetoric towards a language more in tune with global concerns, and specifically with the war on terror. Today, as Libya continues its international rehabilitation, dissenters and critics are imprisoned for “terrorist” crimes. Some belong to

an armed Islamic opposition. In addition to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which is on the U.S. government's list of terrorist groups, others such as the Martyrs Group apparently seek the government's violent overthrow. But the government has used the reality of this armed opposition to justify silencing peaceful dissent in the name of fighting terror.

The government's new tactics were evident in the January 2005 decision to abolish the People's Court, which had long tried political crimes in violation of both Libyan and international law. The government transferred the cases before the court to regular criminal courts, and it remains to be seen whether they will provide the defendants with the due process that Libyan law guarantees. In addition, hundreds of Libyans convicted by the People's Court after unfair trials remain behind bars. Head of the Internal Security Agency Col. Tohamy Khaled told Human Rights Watch in May that those in prison for politically-related crimes were "terrorists" who had politicized Islam and sought the violent overthrow of the government.

These prisoners include 86 members of the Muslim Brotherhood arrested in 1998. The Brotherhood in Libya is a religious, social, and political group that denounces violence. But to Col. Tohamy, the Brotherhood is breeding ground for terrorists. "They spread an ideology until they're ready, and the next step is using violence," he recently said. In a positive development, the Supreme Court ruled in October 2005 that the Brotherhood members should get a new trial, which will take place November 28.

The government currently is considering revising the penal code to reduce the number of crimes punishable by the death penalty, but Libyan officials have indicated that they will retain the option of punishing "terrorist" crimes with death. How the law defines terrorism—and whether that definition will be narrow enough to exclude peaceful criticism—remains to be seen. In addition, the notorious Law 71 (which bans any group activity opposed to the 1969 revolution and may bring the death penalty) remains on the books.

As the Libyan government works to improve its image abroad, there have been modest improvements. In September 2005, the government released five long-term political prisoners and a government committee recommended that 131 others be freed, among them the 86 Muslim Brothers. As of early November, however, all 131 men remained in prison. On November 15, the Supreme Court will review the controversial case of five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor on death row for infecting 426 children with HIV, and it remains to be seen how the court will rule.

More promising than the limited government steps has been a slowly rising tide of public criticism and debate. Academics, journalists, lawyers, and even some government officials have begun to speak more openly of the need for political reform. Their willingness to address previously taboo topics such as corruption and torture is significant.

Rapidly expanding Internet access in Libya is changing the environment by providing uncensored news and fostering debate. Dozens of websites based abroad give people in the country access to previously forbidden news and ideas. The government has tried to block access to some sites, and it arrested one Internet journalist who was posting from Libya. Abd Al Raziq Al Mansuri joined another peaceful critic in custody: former government official Fathi Al Jahmi. The Internal Security Agency has held Al Jahmi without trial since March 2004 after he criticized Qadhafi in the international media. Notably, Al Mansuri's family issued a public letter in October boldly condemning his arrest. Such criticism from inside has been rare until now.

As Libya continues to open to the world, the pressure for change from citizens is likely to increase. The West, thus far focused on securing Libya as a partner in the war on terror and gaining access to Libya's vast oil fields, should do more to encourage this trend. This applies particularly to the United States, which is likely to resume full diplomatic relations with Libya in the coming year. The United States and other Western countries should promote ties with academics, students, professionals, and other non-governmental actors, as well as hold the Libyan government to account when it imprisons peaceful opponents and stifles debate.

Fred Abrahams is a Senior Researcher at Human Rights Watch. He visited Libya for the organization in April-May 2005.

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Saudi Arabia: Municipal Councils and Political Reform

Jafar M. Al-Shayeb

Saudis are still awaiting the inauguration of their partially-elected municipal councils, despite the fact that the last round of elections was held eight months ago. The delay has dampened popular enthusiasm for the councils and raised questions about the Saudi government's seriousness about political reform. It had been hoped that the municipal elections would open the door for wider popular participation and elections to other political bodies.

Elections and other opportunities for popular participation existed early on in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, although they were limited to a few regions and posts. Until the early 1960s, municipal councils were fully elected, as were some academic and business posts. In the early 1960s, however, ultraconservative religious leaders supporting the Saudi regime deemed the idea of elections unlawful. In an effort to strengthen central government, the elected councils were dissolved and replaced with appointed district and provisional councils.

The decision to reestablish municipal councils was technically taken in 1977 but implemented only this year. One hundred

seventy-nine municipal councils (consisting of four to fourteen members based on the size of each municipality) were created. Half of the members were elected; the remainder will be appointed by the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs. The responsibilities of these councils include preparing the municipality's budget and organizational structure, issuing codes and standards for urban planning and other activities, supervising financial transactions, and setting taxes and service charges.

Positive aspects of this year's elections included wide-ranging debate on issues and experimentation with political tactics. Campaign programs were a sort of democratic wedding, with citizens invited to enormous tents to hear speakers invited by candidates discuss issues such as corruption, land distribution, state budgets, wealth distribution, the rule of law and equal opportunities. Candidates created alliances among themselves, showing fairly sophisticated tactics in forging what were known as the "golden lists."

Other aspects of the electoral process—which enfranchised only males over twenty-one not serving in the military, a mere 20 percent of the population—limited participation and enthusiasm. The government also exerted little effort to educate citizens and motivate them to vote, which may explain the low turnout around the country. The exceptions were the regions where social activists and community leaders actively promoted the elections and organized registration centers.

The effectiveness of the municipal councils also will be undermined by both electoral and structural factors. Each city was divided into many subdistricts and citizens cast votes for candidates in all of them, weakening the concept of direct representation. The fact that half of the council members will be appointed is likely to create tension in the council, as each appointee will try to defend the interests of his backers. Another shortcoming is the limited authority given to these municipal councils. They have no say in the sale and distribution of public lands (a sensitive issue due to official abuses), for example, nor will they oversee other public services such as health, education, and sewage.

Elected councilmen are well aware of the councils' shortcomings and are considering ways to address them once the councils are activated. Members are preparing to establish a national association of municipal councils in order to coordinate strategies and programs. Such an association could give the councils a more explicitly political role and would help them monitor and supervise government projects in order to reduce corruption and improve performance at the municipal level. Another common goal among elected council members is to increase communication with constituents by establishing community centers in all districts, a measure recently approved by the government.

The municipal elections in Saudi Arabia proved that citizens are ready for more political reform and for additional direct elections. Now it is up to the government to inaugurate the councils, allow them to play an active role in the political life of the country, and move on to begin a comprehensive and inclusive political reform program. Invigorated political debate and activity among Saudis would be an important antidote to the influence of the violent, fanatical groups that threaten the country.

Jafar Al-Shayeb is a Saudi writer and an elected member of the Qatif Municipal Council.

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News and Views

Egypt: Parliamentary Elections Begin

The first of three rounds of elections for the People's Assembly (the lower house of parliament) took place November 9, with runoffs November 15. The electoral commission announced November 17 that out of 164 seats in the first round, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) won 112, Muslim Brothers 34, other opposition parties 5, and independents 12 seats. Among the 112 NDP seats were a large number of candidates who had broken with the NDP to run as independents but then rejoined after winning seats.

As expected, senior NDP leaders and government ministers including People's Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour, Chief of Presidential Cabinet Zakaria Azmi, NDP Vice Chairman Kamal Al Shazli, and Finance Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali retained their seats. Hossam Badrawi, a prominent pro-reform member of the NDP, lost his race. Al Ghad party Ayman Nour leader lost the parliamentary seat he has held for ten years to a former security officer running on behalf of the NDP. Nour disputed the result and accused the NDP of intimidation and vote buying. Senior Wafd Party Deputy Munir Fakhry Abdel Nour was also defeated.

Election monitors organized by civil society groups reported a number of violations. Hafez Abu Seada, head of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, complained of NDP-organized violence to discourage opposition voters. A joint statement by the National Campaign for Monitoring Elections, the Shadow Committee for Monitoring Elections, and the Civil Society Election Monitoring Observatory reported incidents of vote-buying and voter coercion as well as outdated and incomplete registration lists. The statement asserts that some monitors were denied access to some polls and that the NDP transported government employees to a single polling place and allowed them to vote for an NDP candidate who victory was not assured. The Independent Commission for Election Monitoring reported several cases of vote-buying, intimidation of voters, ballot box stuffing, and repeat voting by NDP candidates and their supporters. Monitors also reported that in many cases they were excluded from observing vote counting.

Subsequent rounds for the remaining 280 seats will be held November 20 and December 1, with runoffs to be completed by December 7. President Mubarak will appoint ten additional members and will call the 454-member Assembly into session

on December 13. Elections are held on a winner-takes-all system, with two candidates (one of whom must be a “worker” or “farmer”) elected in each district.

Procedures for the elections will differ from those in 2000 parliamentary elections in several respects. First, there is now a Higher Commission for Parliamentary Elections, albeit not an independent one, headed by the Minister of Justice. Second, the Commission has agreed to allow Egyptian monitors trained and organized by non-governmental organizations to observe the process inside and outside of polling places. Third, the Commission approved the use of transparent ballot boxes to decrease the likelihood of fraud. As in 2000, judges will supervise all polling and counting stations.

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) will run a candidate for each seat (click [here](#) for a list and [here](#) for the NDP's electoral platform). The Muslim Brotherhood is expected to run approximately 130 candidates nationwide, double the number it put forward in 2000. The Brotherhood has campaigned far more openly this year than in recent years, organizing electoral marches in Cairo and other cities. It continues to employ the slogan “Islam is the Solution,” despite protests from the NDP and secular opposition groups. The Higher Commission for Parliamentary Elections has banned campaign materials using religious symbols. Egyptian authorities have gradually released Muslim Brotherhood leaders arrested after spring protest marches over the past several months. Click [here](#) for the Muslim Brotherhood electoral platform.

Several opposition groups announced on October 8 the formation of a “National Front for Change” which includes the liberal Wafd, leftist Tagammu, and Nasserist parties; the as-yet unlicensed Wasat and Karama parties; the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kifaya); and three other pro-reform movements. The Front is expected to field approximately 200 candidates nationwide. The Muslim Brotherhood has participated in many of the Front's activities but has not agreed to coordinate candidates in most districts. Click [here](#) for the Front's founding statement and [here](#) for information on its electoral platform. The liberal Ghad Party, which is not part of the Front, will put forward approximately 60 candidates.

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Iraq: Political Blocs Complete Alliances

Two hundred and twenty-eight political parties and alliances have registered for the parliamentary elections on December 15, according to the [Independent Electoral Commission for Iraq](#). Most of the major political alliances resemble the dominant groupings in the January 2005 elections. The Kurdistan Alliance is still the main Kurdish bloc, composed of Iraqi President's Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Kurdish regional President Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party. This time, however, it will face competition from the Kurdistan Islamic Union, an Islamist group that has left the alliance. Former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi continues to lead the secular Iraqi National List, although he expanded it to include Sunni figures as well as communists and liberals. The United Iraqi Alliance retains its position as the main Shiite list. Led by Prime Minister Ibrahim Al Jafari, it includes the three major Shiite movements: the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the Dawa party, and the movement led by Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. Unlike in the January elections, however, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani, the most revered Shiite cleric in Iraq, will not endorse the alliance.

New alliances have also formed, such as Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Chalabi's National Congress for Iraq. Most importantly, the elections will be contested by a major Sunni alliance known as the Iraqi Concord Front, composed of three Sunni parties: the Iraqi People's Gathering, the Iraqi National Dialogue, and the Iraqi Islamic Party (the only major Sunni group that supports the constitution). The participation of a Sunni list will probably guarantee greater representation of Sunni Arabs, who currently occupy only 6 percent of parliamentary seats.

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Syria: Opposition Groups Unite in Damascus Declaration

In the midst of international pressure on Syria, Syrian opposition groups released the “Damascus Declaration” on October 16 demanding Syria's transformation through peaceful means from a “security state to a political state” based on free and regular elections, a democratic constitution, the rule of law, pluralism, and individual rights. The declaration calls for an end to Syria's emergency law (in place since 1963), the release of political prisoners, and the return of exiles, and also endorses the cultural and political rights of Kurds and other minorities. The document brought together leftist and nationalist groups, Kurdish movements, secular dissidents, an imprisoned lawmaker, human rights activists, and the exiled leadership of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is banned in Syria but believed to enjoy wide popular support. Click [here](#) for an English translation of the Damascus Declaration.

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Jordan: Islamists Announce Reform Program

While Jordan awaits the release of the National Agenda, the Islamic Action Front and the Muslim Brotherhood presented their own [reform program](#) on October 23. With the declared aim of “achieving comprehensive national reform,” the program calls for political, judicial, economic, educational, social, and administrative reform within a framework that recognizes Islam as the only source of legislation. The document states that political reform must be based on the rotation of executive power and on political participation and pluralism. It also calls for a separation between the executive, legislative, and judicial powers, with a particular emphasis on increasing parliament's powers. This entails making all state institutions accountable to parliament, ensuring full judicial oversight of parliamentary elections, and dissolving the

appointed upper house. In the area of judicial reform, extraordinary courts should be abolished and military courts should only try military personnel.

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Bahrain: Controversy over Reform of Family Law

A campaign for legislation on personal status matters has provoked heated debate in Bahrain. Led by the Supreme Council for Women chaired by King Hamad's wife Shaikha Sabeeka bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, defenders of the initiative argue that the lack of a codified personal status law in Bahrain gives judges excessive discretion in their interpretation of Sharia law and allows them to rule against women in cases of divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Bahrain's largest political society Al Wafaq National Islamic Society is leading the opposition to the legislation on the grounds that it is un-Islamic and that only religious scholars should have a say in determining personal status issues. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are the only Arab states without codified personal status laws.

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United States: National Intelligence Strategy Highlights Democracy Promotion

Bolstering the growth of democracy in other countries is a top strategic mission for the nation's intelligence agencies, according to the **National Intelligence Strategy of the United States of America** released on October 26. The document states that the intelligence community must "support diplomatic and military efforts when intervention is necessary" and "forge relationships with new and incipient democracies that can help them strengthen the rule of law and ward off threats to representative government." It must also provide U.S. policymakers with an analytic framework for identifying both the threats to and opportunities for promoting democracy, as well as warning of state failure.

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Media Freedom Report

Countries in the Middle East (along with some in East Asia and Central Asia) scored the lowest in press freedoms in 2005, according to the annual worldwide **Press Freedom Index** issued by the Paris-based watchdog group Reporters Sans Frontieres. The October 20 report states that the situation in Iraq, which was identified as the most dangerous place on earth for journalists in last year's report, has deteriorated further. In 2005, conditions in Egypt (ranked 143 of 167 countries) also deteriorated with attacks on several journalists and with President Mubarak failing to decriminalize press offences as promised. Authorities in Tunisia also tightened their grip on journalistic activity. In Libya, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, no independent media exist. Lebanon, traditionally the region's top ranking country, dropped more than 50 places because of recent attacks on journalists and now ranks 108 of 167 countries.

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Upcoming Political Events

- Egypt: parliamentary elections, three rounds:
 - November 9 (Cairo, Giza, Menufia, Beni Suef, Minya, Assiut, New Valley, Marsa Matruh);
 - November 20 (Alexandria, Beheira, Ismailia, Port Said, Suez, Qalyubia, Gharbia, Fayyum, Qena);
 - December 1 (Daqahlia, Sharqia, Kafr Al Sheikh, Dumyat, Suhag, Aswan, Red Sea, Northern Sinai, Southern Sinai), 2005.
- G8 "Forum for the Future" meeting, Bahrain, November 11-12, 2005.
- Palestine: municipal elections, last round, 107 districts in the West Bank and Gaza, December 8, 2005.
- Iraq: parliamentary elections, December 15, 2005
- Palestine: legislative elections, January 25, 2006.

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Views from the Arab Media

The United States is pursuing regime change in Syria without publicly declaring so, writes Abdul Wahab Badrakhan in *Al Hayat* on November 5. This strategy reflects lessons learned from Iraq policy, and will focus on weakening the Syrian state to the point where it can safely be dismissed as a negotiating partner. The author predicts the strategy is unlikely to succeed and will only increase regional instability.

Commenting on the increased tension between Syria and the international community in an [article](#) in *Al Sharq Al Awsat* on October 24, Khaled Jalbi paints three scenarios for Syria's future. The Syrian regime may choose the chaotic Iraq model, sectarian strife, or a civilized peaceful transition along the Czech model. The absence of a unified, cohesive opposition, however, does not bode well for the latter option.

In a commentary in Egypt's *Al Ahram* on October 17, Muhammad Al Sayyid Said discounts the significance of the current parliamentary elections, arguing that the limited powers of the People's Assembly preclude its playing a leading role on behalf of democratic change. In addition, there is also no reason to believe that the new parliament will be truly representative. Advocates of change should instead focus on the judiciary because it has shown the ability to defend political and civil rights and to push for constitutional change.

Al Jazeera's live program "[Akthar Min Rai](#)" (More than One Opinion) hosted an October 12 discussion on the situation in Iraq in light of the recent constitutional referendum. Responding to host Sami Haddad's assertion that opposition to the constitution is due to fears of the creation of an independent oil-rich state in the Shiite south similar to the Kurdish state, Said Qandil (member of the constitutional committee and of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq) argued that these fears are based on misunderstanding of the concept of federalism in the constitution. Secretary General of the Iraqi Islamic Party Tariq Al Hashimi defended his party's support for the constitution, asserting that this position does not alienate its Sunni constituents but rather allows them to be incorporated into decision making in Iraq.

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Read On

Several recent publications focus on **Iraq**:

- Although polls show that Iraqis dislike the U.S. occupation, the Iraqi economy is booming and its democracy and reconstruction processes are slowly progressing, argues Michael Rubin in "[Iraq Unplugged: Beyond the Polls, and PowerPoints, What's Really Going On](#)" (American Enterprise Institute, November 1, 2005).
- Nathan Brown writes that elections, constitutional revision, parliamentary legislation, and implementation of federalism—critical elements of the political process in Iraq—offer real opportunities for consensus but are just as likely to engender conflict in "[Is Political Consensus Possible in Iraq?](#)" (Policy Outlook no. 23, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2005).
- If the U.S. involvement in Iraq becomes increasingly complicated and the country's problems escalate, the blame will necessarily lie with President Bush, argues Stephen Walt in "[The Blame Game](#)" (*Foreign Policy*, November/December 2005, 44-6).
- In "Iraq Syndrome" (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005, 44-54), John Mueller notes that support for the Iraq war has declined far more quickly than it did during either the Korean or Vietnam wars.
- Unless the United States stays the course until Iraqis are prepared to take over, Iraq's fledgling democracy will fail and negatively affect the rest of the Muslim world, argues Melvin Lard in "Iraq: Learning Lessons of Vietnam," (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005, 22-43).
- The United States must be prepared to address the fact that today's insurgents in Iraq will become tomorrow's terrorists, contend Peter Bergen and Alec Reynolds ("Blowback Revisited," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005, 2-6).
- A United States Institute of Peace Special Report argues that notwithstanding the insurgency, Iraq has the resources to create one of the most vibrant democracies in the Middle East (Eric Davis, "[Strategies for Promoting Democracy in Iraq](#)," Special Report 153, October 2005).
- Former British paratrooper Mark Etherington tells his story as governor of the Wasit province in southern Iraq in [Revolt on the Tigris: The Al-Sadr Uprising and the Governing of Iraq](#) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, September 2005).

Several recent publications in English and Arabic discuss political reform in **Egypt**:

- If Egyptian Christians participate more actively in politics, they could make a positive contribution to the democratic process, argue Khairi Abaza and Mark Nakhla in “**The Copts and Their Political Implications in Egypt**” (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch no. 1039, October 25, 2005).
- Amr Hamzawy argues that the opposition's poor performance in Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential elections was due to internal weaknesses and miscalculations as well as its inability to present clear programs to its constituents (“**Opposition in Egypt: Performance in the Presidential Election and Prospects for the Parliamentary Elections**,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook no. 22, October 2005).
- Bassma Kodmani calls for cultivating diversity within Egyptian society as an antidote to religious monopolization of the public sphere (“**The Dangers of Political Exclusion: Egypt's Islamist Problem**,” Carnegie Paper no. 63, October 2005).
- The October issue of the quarterly *Al Dimuqratiya* (Democracy) published by the Al Ahram Foundation focuses on the significance and implications of Egypt's presidential elections. Contributors include Emad Shahin, Marina Ottaway, Amr Hamzawy, Nathan Brown, and Michele Dunne.

Several recent publications in English and Arabic address the challenges of Arab political reform:

- In a study published by Al Ahram Center for Strategic Studies (“**Al Islah Al Siyassi: Al Siyassa Al Amrikiya wa Al Istijabat Al Arabiy**” (Political Reform: American Policy and Arab Responses), Mu'taz Salama analyzes the U.S. vision for reform in the Middle East and perceptions of Arab intellectual elites of U.S. reform initiatives.
- The first issue of a new monthly magazine focusing on issues of reform and democracy in the Arab world was published in June 2005. Topics covered in the first five issues of *Al Muraqib Al Arabi* (The Arab Observer, Gulf Strategic Research Center) include political reform in Jordan, Syria, Yemen, and Egypt.
- Barry Rubin provides an historical analysis of liberalism and its failures in the Arab world in *The Long War for Freedom: The Arab Struggle for Democracy in the Middle East* (Wiley, October 2005). Challenged by dictators and extremists, Arab liberals and the United States —if it decides to help them—face a daunting task in trying to bring about democratic change.
- In “U.S. Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East Since 11 September 2001: A Critique,” *International Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 5, October 2005, 963-79), Katerina Dalacoura argues that U.S. efforts have limited impact due to the complicated relationship between democracy and other U.S. interest, the Bush administration's lack of vision for implementing democratic change, and likelihood of a backlash against a forceful approach.

Several recent publications discuss reform-related development in specific Arab countries:

- In the “**Irony of Islah**” (*The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 4, Autumn 2005, 153-70), Gwenn Orkuhlik writes that **Saudi Arabia's** recently instituted reforms fall short of addressing the essential question of political power. Reform measures are instead carefully managed to reassert the authority of the ruling family.
- Mohammad Yaghi and Ben Fishman discuss the legality of Hamas participation in the upcoming **Palestinian** legislative elections and steps that the Palestinian Authority can take to limit its political influence in “**Political Participation and Palestinian Legislative Elections**” (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Peace Watch no. 524, October 31, 2005).

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