

Arab Reform Bulletin: July 2005

Arab Reform Bulletin

نشرة الإصلاح العربي

Published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
Translated by Dar Al-Watan for Journalism, Printing and Publishing.

July 2005, Volume 3, Issue 6
Michele Dunne, Editor
Julia Choucair, Assistant Editor

To view this issue as a PDF, click [here](#).

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

Subscriber Information

Click [here](#) to receive the *Arab Reform Bulletin* via e-mail every month or to unsubscribe.

To subscribe to the Arabic edition of the *Bulletin*, click [here](#).

Click [here](#) to read past issues of the *Bulletin*.

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

Insights and Analysis

Interview with George Ishak, founding member of the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kifaya)

United States: Can Its Middle East Policy Serve Democracy?
Marina Ottaway

Syria: Reform or Repair?
Sami Moubayed

Lebanon: Elections Highlight Confessional System
Julia Choucair

Kuwait: Beyond Women's Suffrage
Abdullah Alshayji

News and Views

Iraq: Constitutional Drafting Underway, International Conference in Brussels

Egypt: Political Laws Amended, Nour Trial Delayed

Lebanon: Results of Parliamentary Elections

Jordan: Government Reshuffle and Anti-Corruption Initiative

Syria: Crackdown on Political Forum

Morocco: Prominent Islamist on Trial

Algeria: International Organizations Criticize Criminal Code

Bahrain: Human Rights Protest, Political Institute Formed

Upcoming Political Events

Views from the Arab Media

Read On

New publications on U.S. policy, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Gulf, and women's rights.

Subscriber Information

Insights and Analysis

Interview with George Ishak, founding member of the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kifaya), June 16, 2005

Translated by Michele Dunne

Who formed the Egyptian Movement for Change, when, and why?

We began in November 2003 as a group of friends, thinking ahead to the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections. We chose seven among us, representing different political outlooks—Islamists, Marxists, Nasserists, liberals—and decided to meet. We put out our first statement after eight months of talks, saying that if you want to confront U.S. and Israeli hegemony, you need a strong state. We said we wanted the state of emergency lifted, free elections—there is no such thing as a presidential referendum—no monopoly of authority or wealth, and limited presidential powers. We put out the statement and 300 people endorsed it—intellectuals, students, farmers, etc.

We had our first conference on September 22, 2004, during the National Democracy Party conference. We chose that time in particular because it was important that they hear another voice. Five hundred people attended, and we felt that people really were yearning for change, that this despotic regime had to come to an end. We agreed on a charter and chose 35 people to lead the Egyptian Movement for Change. Then we decided it was time to get the message out. It's hard to do this due to the Emergency Law. We considered requesting a permit for a demonstration, but I said no, enough of that. The constitution says I have a right to demonstrate and I'm going to exercise it.

A friend suggested we should choose one simple word that anyone could use to express our sentiments. So the word kifaya ("enough") became the movement's slogan. We are saying "enough" to everything: to injustice, despotism, unemployment, corruption, unfair distribution of wealth, monopoly of authority—to all our daily sufferings.

On December 12 we held our first demonstration in front of Attorney General's office, a silent demonstration. We chose that particular location because we wanted to stress the importance of the judiciary. We support the Judges Club strongly, because the judiciary—if it is transparent and clean—is the only institution that can protect citizens. Without the judiciary, there is no protection. One thousand people came to that demonstration and we accomplished two things: we broke the culture of fear and reclaimed our right to demonstrate. That was very important because fear of the police controls Egyptians.

We said at the time that we wanted to see three articles of the constitution amended: 75, 76, and 77. Article 75 should call for full financial disclosure by the president before he can run for another term, so you can see what he did while in office. Article 76 was about the referendum on the presidency and 77 talks about term in office. We asked for institution of term limits, two four-year terms and no more.

We held some more demonstrations and then Mubarak announced this business of amending only article 76 on the presidential referendum. We are not against amending any article, but what the government has done is rubbish. Apparently they are determined to prevent any real change. They said if you want to say anything about the amendments, say it before the People's Assembly. We said fine, and went to the People's Assembly to present our demands. Of course the doors were barred and there were police guarding them. Seven or eight colleagues and I went up to the officer in charge, who said in five minutes a car was coming to take us to jail. I said, "Go ahead, why not?" Then we held a demonstration in front of the Journalists' Syndicate and made our demands.

After that the draft constitutional amendment came out, and we saw that the restrictions on opposition and independent candidates really deprive the amendment of all significance. We began to focus on delegitimizing the amendment and the referendum by which it would be passed. We held three demonstrations in Cairo and 21 in provinces on May 25, the day of the referendum. I went out that day and saw there were police surrounding all the places we planned to demonstrate. All kinds of beatings, crimes, and violations of the law took place, and we held a press conference in which I held President Mubarak responsible, by virtue of his position, for protecting the safety of Egyptians.

Observers say that Kifaya and other liberal movements come from the political elite, not the grassroots. Is this true, and is it possible to have a grassroots democratic movement in the Middle East?

We did come from the elite, which is always the group to mobilize society. At first we had a presence in Cairo, Alexandria,

and Mansoura only. Today we have coordinators in 21 provinces. We started out with 300 members and now have 7000. Three hundred and fifty thousand people have visited our website and 2000 people per day exchange opinions on it. And we will continue.

Two or three years ago the political conditions would not have allowed the emergence of a movement like Kifaya. What changed?

Let's be frank. No one can deny that foreign pressure has helped, as has domestic and regional pressure. The whole region is boiling. Beginning with the Palestinian and Iraqi occupations, the whole world is waking up. Also it helped that there were presidential and parliamentary elections coming and we couldn't just remain silent about that. Egypt is in a state of weakness economically. And where are we in terms of a regional political stance? I don't have any problem cooperating with the West, with America, with the whole world, but on the basis of equality, not humiliation.

I wish the government would respond to purely internal demands, but it does not. Look at the dialogue with the opposition parties; four months and they got nothing. If you follow the debate on the law of presidential elections, you will see that they are trying to outdo each other in finding ways not to open up. Because of that, I believe completely that this regime has to go; there's no point. President Mubarak should take a rest. That is our hope. As for Gamal Mubarak, he is the son of the regime. He has a new look but he is merely a more modern form of despot.

What is the effect in Egypt of U.S. policy regarding democracy?

We have had a parliament since 1862, and demands for democracy are longstanding. Now there is a synergy between external and internal changes. If the outside were calling for democracy and there was no activity inside, what would be the result? Nothing. So outside and inside factors are working together.

What is the relationship between Kifaya and the political parties? Will Kifaya become a political party or propose candidates for elections?

We are in dialogue with all the parties—the Muslim Brotherhood, Nasserists, Tagammu, Al Ghad, the Labor Party—all political forces. We invite them to all our activities and they participate or not according to their circumstances.

I prefer that we remain a movement rather than a party. Parties have many restrictions. We are working in the streets and that is extremely important in the current phase. Regarding elections, we might support certain candidates—those who have cooperated with us, who we feel are with the people and are effective—whether independents or in parties.

Is there a new wave of contacts and coordination between Islamists and secularists in Egypt ?

There is an Islamic camp; it is undeniably part of Egyptian society. If the Islamists come in with us as partners, we welcome that, as long as they operate as a political rather than a religious group. The Muslim Brothers learned from us about articulating political rather than religious slogans; they used to raise the Qur'an during political demonstrations but now have stopped. This is Kifaya's influence. Their younger generation is beginning to work with us.

From Kifaya's point of view, what are the most important political reform steps for Egypt now?

First, we will delegitimize the recent constitutional amendment, which will not lead to democracy. We demand real democracy, genuine and complete judicial supervision of all aspects of the electoral process, and keeping the ruling establishment out of the process of legal and constitutional reform because they are incapable of it. For example, having people on the electoral commission who have been guilty of bribery and violating the law—is this the democracy we want? We want complete independence for the judges, as they are demanding. That way we can build democracy.

What about upcoming elections and monitors?

We are not that interested in the presidential election. What we are interested in is that this regime come to an end. Regarding parliamentary elections, we will see the revised laws when they are out of parliament. Everyone is saying we need proportional representation but the government is not responding—as though there is no Egyptian people, as though they don't exist.

Regarding monitors, Egypt has sent observers to monitor elections in other countries, and now it will not accept them here? All this talk is pompous nonsense. Someone put out an Islamic legal opinion yesterday saying that the ink used to stain voters' fingers so that they can vote only once is "forbidden." But fraud is not forbidden.

What will Kifaya do if President Mubarak is elected?

We will begin the struggle anew on behalf of a free, democratic state that respects the rights of citizens. Citizenship means complete equality without discrimination based on religion, sex, etc. Our main issues now are ending violence and showing that the upcoming presidential election is illegitimate. And we will keep fighting even if President Mubarak starts another term. We will fight in the streets to the end and we won't stop no matter what happens.

Change in Egypt will come from the people, from their awareness. It cannot come from outside or from the regime; forget about the regime. We put all our confidence in the people, who still don't realize fully that their economic and social problems are due to this regime. Once they realize, they will move. This is our task and it requires serious effort. And I don't think change will come suddenly. If we continue to work at this pace, it will take ten years. The important thing is that we have begun.

[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

United States: Can Its Middle East Policy Serve Democracy?

Marina Ottaway

Arabs often question the United States' commitment to promoting democracy in the Middle East, arguing its policies are inconsistent and even hypocritical. In reality, the commitment to democracy by President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is unquestionable, based on a genuine conviction that a democratic Middle East serves the security interests of the United States. But U.S. policy toward the region tries to balance the new post-September 11 perception of a democratic imperative with old concerns about access to oil and U.S. and Israeli security. Furthermore, not all agencies of the U.S. government have embraced the democracy agenda with the same fervor, with the Department of Defense in particular remaining somewhat skeptical about the link between democracy and U.S. security. Tensions created by these disparate interests and commitments lead to policy outcomes that do not always help the promotion of democracy.

The old concerns that guided U.S. policy in the Middle East are well known: security, oil and Israel. All U.S. administrations have—understandably—sought to prevent threats to U.S. security emanating from the region. During the Cold War, the perceived threat was the possibility of close relations between the Soviet Union and Arab regimes, which led the United States to be tolerant of autocratic but reliably anti-Soviet governments. With the Soviet Union gone, the perceived threat is now terrorism. The policy response to this new threat has been somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, the Bush administration takes the position that lack of democracy is a major cause of terrorism and castigates Arab regimes for authoritarianism. On the other hand, as in Cold War days, the United States remains well disposed toward regimes that side with it in the fight against terrorism and is willing to overlook shortcomings in their domestic policies when they cooperate. The ambiguity of the policy is seen clearly in relations with Egypt. Washington needs and appreciates Egyptian cooperation against terrorism and thus wants to maintain strong relations with the Mubarak government. It also wants the country to reform politically, convinced that in the long run this would prevent terrorism. As a result, Egypt is receiving mixed messages from the United States.

Availability of oil at stable prices is another constant concern. U.S. dependence on Middle East oil remains high, despite the growing importance of supplies from West Africa and the Caspian Sea, and the United States cannot afford to alienate oil producers in the region. The contradictions caused by oil dependence are most evident in the policy toward Saudi Arabia. The kingdom is seen as major source of terrorism, directly through the propagation of Wahhabism and indirectly because of its repressive domestic policies. But Saudi Arabia has huge oil reserves, excess production capacity that until recently helped moderate increases in oil prices, and furthermore is reasonably cooperative in the war on terrorism. As a result, Saudi Arabia has been the target of much criticism but U.S. policy toward it remains cautious.

Finally, all U.S. administrations have been committed to the security of Israel, although this commitment has led to different policies over time. For the Carter administration, guaranteeing Israel's security meant pushing the peace process forward, even if this entailed putting pressure on Israel to accept compromises. Other administrations have been content to back Israel in all its policies. During George W. Bush's first term in office, the peace process was neglected, and the Sharon government received unconditional support. There has been no real change in the second term so far.

The new commitment to democracy has not eliminated previous concerns, but added a fourth element to this already complex picture, creating new contradictions. In the short and even medium run, processes of democratization can be extremely destabilizing. Thus, there is real fear in the Bush administration that the political transformation of the Middle East could lead to outcomes that threaten U.S. interests, such as the rise to power of radical Islamists in some countries or extreme instability in others. As a result, the United States wants democratic processes to unfold in the region, but slowly, and it also wants to be sure that outcomes will be acceptable. For example, it wants elections, but it does not want to see

the victory of Islamist parties, and least of all of organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which have much popular support but are hostile to Israel and have armed wings.

The ideological and moral commitment of the Bush administration to democracy in the Middle East is now beyond doubt. What is still in doubt is whether a policy that has to satisfy many conflicting goals can achieve coherence and have a positive overall effect on the democratic transformation of the region.

Marina Ottaway is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and co-editor (with Thomas Carothers) of Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005).

[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

Syria: Reform or Repair?

Sami Moubayed

When the Baath Party held its conference in Damascus on June 6-9, it had no intention to reform Syria. It wanted to repair Syria. This distinction is critical to interpreting what is going on. The Arabic word for either reform or repair is “*islah*,” which means literally “to restore to sound condition after damage or injury.” Reform, on the other hand, means to form again, which in Syria’s case would mean to begin a non-Baathist political era.

Before the conference, speculation was rife about a “jasmine revolution,” in which President Bashar Al Asad would launch a peaceful coup against everyone and everything Baathist, akin to what President Anwar Al Sadat of Egypt did after coming to power in 1970. Among other things, Syrians were hoping for a general amnesty, pardon for political exiles, creation of a multi-party system, retirement of the so-called old guard of the Baath, and abolishing article 8 of the Syrian Constitution, which enshrines the Baath as the ruling party. Instead, the message that emerged from the conference was that the Baath would do what it took to survive, and was here to stay.

Among the major announcements of the conference was that a law authorizing independent political parties would be issued soon, thereby apparently ending the 40-year Baath monopoly. While in itself a positive step, there were two catches. First, there was never any intention of amending the constitutional article on Baath supremacy. Second, the law would prevent the emergence of any Islamic party. The two conditions for licensing are that new parties must be neither Islamic nor based on sub-Syrian nationalism (Kurdish for example). The Baath regime was threatened by the Muslim Brotherhood twice, in 1964 and 1982. Since then, Islamists have been rooted out of public political life in Syria, moving underground. The continued refusal to allow Islamists legitimate political participation will only lead to increased militancy.

The other significant result of the conference was the retirement of nearly all the old-timers in the regime, a move warmly received by the Syrian people. Among those to lose their jobs were former chief of staff Ali Aslan, former chief of military intelligence Hassan Khalil, former director of political security Adnan Bader Hasan, former vice president Abd Al Halim Khaddam, former prime minister Muhammad Mustapha Miro, former defense minister Mustapha Tlas, former assistant secretary generals of the Baath Party Abdullah Al Ahmar and Sulayman Qaddah, former speaker of parliament Abd Al Qadir Qaddura, and generals Shafiq Al Fayyad and Ibrahim Al Safi. The average age gap between the young president and these retired officials is 30 years. The other major change came one week after the conference when Al Asad replaced Bahjat Sulayman, the powerful director of interior security, with Fouad Nassif, an officer from military intelligence. With the exception of Foreign Minister Farouk Al Shara, the only ones to stay behind in the Baath Party are relatively new faces who emerged under Bashar such as Prime Minister Muhammad Naji Al Otari, Speaker of Parliament Mahmud Al Abrash, Defense Minister Hasan Turkmani, Finance Minister Muhammad Husayn, and Minister of Expatriate Affairs Buthaina Shaaban.

This shake-up puts a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of the Syrian president. It also suggests that perhaps he has been in control all along. Many Syrians have believed that their president truly wanted reform but was prevented from carrying it out by aged politicians who did not want to upset the status quo or share power. Whether that was true or not, President Al Asad now clearly is free to surround himself with reform-minded officials and create the sort of Syria he wishes. The majority of the Syrians are still waiting and willing to give him the benefit of the doubt.

The Syrian regime has decided to reform, marginally, and used the party conference —intended to increase Al Asad’s popularity and restore disgruntled Syrians’ confidence in the party and the state—to create a united front and ward off U.S. pressure. In any case, democratic reform in Syria has not generally been a priority for the United States. With the exception of Secretary of State Rice’s June 20 remarks in Cairo, not one senior U.S. official has come out to harangue Syria for its

one-party regime. On the contrary, the United States generally criticizes Syria about foreign affairs issues (the resistance in Palestine, Hezbollah operations in south Lebanon, and Iraq) on which there happens to be a consensus between President Al Asad and the Syrian people. Al Asad has now dealt handily with U.S. pressure and shown Syrians and the world that the Baath may indeed repair itself, but it will not step down, and sees no need to “re-form” Syria.

Dr Sami Moubayed is a Syrian political analyst. He is the author of Damascus Between Democracy and Dictatorship 1948-1958 (University Press of America 2000) and Steel & Silk: Men and Women Who Shaped Syria 1900-2000 (Cune Press 2005).

Return to table of contents. Printer-friendly version.

Lebanon: Elections Highlight Confessional System

Julia Choucair

Compared to the dramatic events that shook Lebanon in the past six months, the parliamentary elections that took place between May 29 and June 19 were anti-climactic. Local and foreign observers expressed disappointment that, apart from the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, remarkably little has changed. Hopes for an immediate and major political transformation, however, were unrealistic. The elections served as a reminder that the basic problems of the confessional system have not yet been addressed.

In principle, recent events in Lebanon have opened up a historic opportunity for real political change. The Syrian withdrawal allows the public to express its views more openly and address issues suppressed since the end of the civil war, from sectarian relations and the distribution of power to Hezbollah's arms and the status of Palestinian refugees. Most importantly, Lebanon is witnessing unprecedented international pressure for economic and political reform.

In practice, these events resulted in some surface alterations but have not yet brought about structural political change. While there was true contestation in the last two electoral rounds as well as international and local monitoring of the polls, the electoral framework remained unchanged. The nature of the 2000 electoral law is such that once a strong coalition list has been formed in a particular district, it will generally sweep all the seats, thus not allowing the entry of new actors into the political system. This resulted in various uncontested seats in the south Lebanon and Beirut rounds. Politicians also continued to pay lip service to concepts such as “coexistence” and “national reconciliation” but failed to present concrete electoral agendas.

The elections highlighted the daunting obstacles to a real opening in the system, in particular the fact that different communities in Lebanon continue to engage in zero-sum politics. During the massive demonstrations following former prime minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination, the opposition movement (which included prominent Christian, Druze, and Sunni Muslim figures) managed to convey an impression that the Lebanese had bridged old divides and overcome the bitter legacies of the civil war. This semblance of unity began to crumble during the pre-electoral political bargaining. As the four rounds of the elections unfolded, politicians across the board did not hesitate to level sectarian accusations at opponents. Politics thus continue to be waged in a context of intense fear among sects who behave as though any compromise would sound their death knell.

The elections also polarized the confessional system further, as certain figures emerged as the unchallenged leaders of their respective communities. Running on the legacy of his father, Saad Hariri has become the leader of the Sunni community with 23 of 27 Sunni MPs belonging to his Tayyar Al Mustaqbal (Future Movement) list. Twenty-three of 27 Shiite MPs are from the two dominant Shiite groups Hezbollah and Amal. All eight Druze seats belong to Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. The 64 Christian seats were more heterogeneous, divided among the Lebanese Forces, Qornet Shahwan, and General Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement. However, Aoun did emerge as the leader of the Maronite community with 21 parliamentary seats.

This sectarian polarization bodes ill for a process of political reform in Lebanon based on concrete proposals for nation building, addressing corruption, and communal reconciliation that includes the wider public, as opposed to the intermittent reconciliations of elites. The only hope for change is the fact that this time post-election expectations—both domestic and international—are much higher than before. Domestically there is a sense of dissatisfaction with the current system, predominantly because of the economic crisis the country is facing. While to this day the public has rallied behind their confessional leaders and failed to hold them accountable, there is a palpable sense that the current economic and political situation is untenable. Moreover, Lebanese can no longer blame Syria for all their failures.

The new parliament might begin to introduce certain economic reforms in an effort to appease domestic and foreign pressures. Former Prime Minister Najib Mikati recently presented “The Way to Beirut Pact,” an economic rescue plan that

aims at moving the country out of the postwar debt-spiraling reconstruction phase and into a vibrant emerging economy.

Political reforms that move beyond the ossified confessional system, however, will be harder to implement, as shown by the June 28 selection of Amal leader Nabih Berri as parliamentary speaker. Despite international opposition to his reinstatement due to allegations of corruption, he was reelected by an overwhelming 90 votes of 128. The ongoing delay in the cabinet formation also highlights how difficult it will be for Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's government to articulate a coherent reform agenda. Lebanon's major sects are fighting over key ministerial positions, a pattern that will probably be repeated with every major decision or initiative the government takes.

Julia Choucair is Assistant Editor of the Arab Reform Bulletin.

[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

Kuwait: Beyond Women's Suffrage

Abdullah Alshayji

In what will be remembered as the year of the woman in Kuwait, Prime Minister Sabah Ahmad Al Sabah on June 12 appointed Massouma Al Mubarak as Minister of Planning and Administrative Development. Just one month earlier, the feisty Kuwaiti parliament gave women the vote after having resisted the Emir's initiative since 1999. These steps have changed politics in Kuwait permanently. Other Gulf countries are undergoing similar transformations—Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates also now have female cabinet members—but the achievement of women's political rights was even more significant in Kuwait, where it was the result of intensive political and social debate rather than executive fiat.

The appointment of Minister Al Mubarak, a liberal Shiite academic with a degree from the University of Denver, served several purposes at once for the Kuwaiti government. In addition to addressing the longstanding aspirations of Kuwaiti women, the choice of Al Mubarak also mollified Shiites, who had been disgruntled since the only Shiite minister resigned from the cabinet in January 2005. The fact that Al Mubarak wore a headscarf also served to blunt criticism of her appointment by Islamists, who had inserted into the recent suffrage bill a clause calling for women politicians to abide by Islamic law. And of course the move won Kuwait high marks from the international community on the eve of U.S. Secretary of State Rice's visit to Kuwait and the Kuwaiti Prime Minister's visit to Washington.

For Kuwaiti women now, the immediate challenge is how to mobilize themselves and translate their newfound rights into effective political participation. The battle of political awareness is upon us, and the burden falls squarely on Kuwaiti women's organizations and their supporters to prove wrong those who opposed suffrage on the grounds that women were not prepared to exercise such rights.

While some in Kuwait hope that women's suffrage will mark the end of the road for reform, most believe it is only the first step toward greater political involvement and power sharing. Now the long-postponed discussion of political reforms can begin. One issue likely to emerge is redrawing electoral districts from the current 25 to ten or even five districts in order to make them more broadly representative (and less based on sectarian or tribal factors) and to discourage vote buying and changing residency. Furthermore, debate is likely to resume on the issue of lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, an initiative supported by most members of parliament (including the Interior and Armed Services Committees) but so far opposed by the government.

The huge influx of women voters—which will increase eligible Kuwaitis from 140,000 to 350,000 for the 2007 parliamentary elections—will also lead to serious discussion of legalizing political parties. If in addition the voting age is lowered to 18 and military personnel are enfranchised, the current voter base would be tripled. In this situation, there will be an urgent need for political parties (until now forbidden) to organize and channel participation. Parties will also be needed to improve women's chances of being elected to parliament, because in the absence of quotas few will be elected as independents. In any case, the era of independent candidates is over in Kuwait for men as well as women.

Women's suffrage might have another salutary effect on Kuwaiti politics in that it is serving to shift the focus of politics from personal, tribal, and sectarian factors to a broader and more comprehensive national political sphere. Thus Kuwaitis with better professional qualifications might be attracted to run for office, whereas in the past many shied away due to the consuming demands of personal patronage. Until now, such personalized politics have undermined checks and balances as well as accountability and oversight in the Kuwaiti system.

Since its inception over four decades ago, the Kuwaiti parliamentary experience has been the harbinger and beacon for other Gulf states. With the full participation of all its citizens, Kuwait now becomes more important than ever before as an

indigenous model. As such, the fate of the Kuwaiti experiment is no longer solely a domestic issue but one of regional significance.

Abdullah Alshayji is Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University.

[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

News and Views

Iraq: Constitutional Drafting Underway, International Conference in Brussels

Federalism is among the contentious issues being debated by the 71-member drafting committee for the Iraqi constitution, due to be completed by August 15 and put to a nationwide referendum by mid-October. Other controversial issues include women's rights, religious issues, participation of former Baathists, and presidential powers, as well as the official name of the new Iraq. Subcommittees have already drafted substantial portions outlining the system of government and a bill of rights ; click [here](#) for a translation and analysis of the draft bill of rights. The committee reportedly is working toward referring a draft of the constitution to the full National Assembly in early August.

Officials from over 80 countries and international organizations pledged to reinvigorate financial aid to Iraq at an international conference co-hosted by the European Union and the United States in Brussels on June 22. They urged Iraqi leaders to ensure that the constitution-writing process include citizens of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. Iraqi officials pressed Arab states to become more involved in rebuilding efforts. Egypt and Jordan announced they would send ambassadors to Baghdad, but Egypt temporarily closed its mission on July 7 after Ambassador-designate Ihab Sherif was kidnapped and killed. Iraq has received only a fraction of the \$13 billion in aid pledged at a 2003 conference in Madrid. A donors' conference is scheduled to be held in Amman July 18-19. Click [here](#) to read the Brussels statement.

[Return to table of contents](#)

Egypt: Political Laws Amended, Nour Trial Delayed

Egypt 's People's Assembly passed a series of controversial amendments to laws on presidential and parliamentary elections before adjourning July 5 until after the fall 2005 elections. Opposition groups expressed frustration because amendments included little of their input despite a well-publicized dialogue with the National Democratic Party (NDP).

After having passed an amendment to the constitution in May providing for direct election of the president, parliament approved a presidential election law in mid-June, creating a 10-member electoral commission (five other judges and five independent figures) and detailing requirements for candidates and other campaign regulations. The government took the unusual step of submitting the presidential election law to the Supreme Constitutional Court for review in order to avoid having the election overturned on constitutional grounds. The court objected to some technical provisions of the law, which was then passed by the parliament in revised form.

In early July the presidential election commission was formed, headed by Chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court Mamdouh Marei. Presidential Chief of Staff Zakaria Azmi said in late June that Egypt 's first presidential election would be held on September 7, but the date is not considered official until announced by the new commission.

Changes to the political participation law (amending Law 73 of 1956) passed by parliament created a second electoral commission to oversee elections for the upper (Shura Council) and lower (People's Assembly) houses of parliament. The 11-member commission will be headed by the Minister of Justice and will include a representative from the Interior Ministry, three senior judges, and six independent members to be selected by the two houses of parliament. Critics asserted that the commission is dominated by NDP members who have been responsible for electoral irregularities in the past. Journalists have protested the amended law's new penalties for publishing false information with the intent to affect election results. The law also introduced penalties for any candidate who accepts foreign funding.

The most controversial aspect of the revised political parties law passed July 4 (amending Law 40 of 1977) was its reshaping of the committee that licenses and regulates parties. The committee will henceforth be headed by the Chairman of the Shura Council (currently NDP Secretary General Safwat Sharif), and will include the Ministers of Interior and People's Assembly Affairs as well as three former judges and three independent public figures. Opposition critics have called for dismantling the committee or balancing NDP and opposition membership. The revised law makes it easier for new parties in

that they are considered automatically licensed if the committee does not object within 90 days of the party's notification of formation, but it preserves the committee's ability to block any new party not deemed to "add something new" to existing parties.

Two new political parties, the Peace Democratic Party and Egypt Youth Party, were licensed just before the law was amended, bringing the number of licensed parties to 21. Two other active parties (the Islamist "Center Party" and Nasserist "Karama Party") that have sought permits remain unlicensed.

The parliament did not discuss amendments to the Law of the Judiciary (law 35 of 1984) before adjourning, as had been demanded by Egypt's Judges Club as a condition for monitoring elections. The Judges Club is due to meet in early September to discuss further steps.

The Shura Council in late June appointed ten new editors to the major state-run publications, replacing editors who in many cases had served for more than 20 years. Retirees included Ibrahim Nafie of *Al Ahrām*, the Arab world's largest and oldest press organization, and Ibrahim Seada of *Akhbar Al Yom*, who resigned shortly before the forced retirements. Most of the new appointees are journalists in their 40s or 50s who have risen through the ranks of Egyptian news organizations.

Opposition politician Ayman Nour's trial was postponed on July 6 after a key government witness recanted his testimony against Nour and asked for protection from security officials who he said had threatened his family. Nour has denied charges that he falsified signatures on documents under which his Al Ghad ("Tomorrow") Party was registered. Nour expressed concern that the scheduled trial resumption date of September 25 might interfere with his bid to run for the presidency.

[Return to table of contents](#)

Lebanon: Results of Parliamentary Elections

An anti-Syrian opposition coalition list won a majority in Lebanon's parliament in the elections held in four rounds between May 29 and June 19. Led by Saad Hariri, son of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the Future Movement (Tayyar al Mustaqbal) list won 72 of 128 parliamentary seats. The Shiite coalition of parties Amal and Hezbollah won 35 seats. General Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement won the remaining 21 seats. Click [here](#) for detailed results and analysis of elections.

[Return to table of contents](#)

Jordan: Government Reshuffle and Anti-Corruption Initiative

Jordan's Prime Minister Adnan Badran reshuffled his cabinet on July 3 in an effort to win a parliamentary vote of confidence, denied since his first attempt to form a government in April. The 53 (out of 110) members of parliament who withheld confidence from the earlier cabinet based on the grounds that it was not "geographically diverse" said they would decide whether to confirm the new cabinet once they see its policy statement. The new cabinet includes eight new ministers, seven of whom have served in previous governments. Observers believe that in the new cabinet Badran opted for less controversial ministers, thereby undermining the government's reformist potential. Click [here](#) for a complete list of the new cabinet.

Following a request from King Abdullah, Prime Minister Badran on June 27 formed an ad hoc committee to draft an anti-corruption law. The committee, composed of Justice Minister Muhammad Alawneh and Minister of State for Legal Affairs Abed Shakhaneh, will also monitor state agencies, civil society institutions, and public shareholding companies. The London-based Transparency International ranks Jordan 37 out of 146 countries in its 2004 Corruption Perception Index.

[Return to table of contents](#)

Syria: Crackdown on Political Forum

Syrian security services ordered the Al Atassi Forum for National Dialogue, the country's only remaining political forum, to close down several weeks after briefly detaining its founder and seven other members on May 24. The directors of the forum have refused to comply on the grounds that the order did not come from the appropriate authorities. The Atassi Forum was one of several groups set up during the short period of political opening after President Bashar Al Assad succeeded his father in 2000.

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Morocco: Prominent Islamist on Trial

Nadia Yassine, the unofficial spokeswoman of Morocco's officially unrecognized Islamist movement Al Adl wa Al Ihsan (Justice and Charity), has been charged with defaming the monarchy. Yassine said she preferred a republic to an "autocratic regime" in an interview with the *Al Usbuiyya Al Jadida* daily on June 2. Editor Abdelaziz Koukas is also on trial. If convicted, they will face jail sentences of three to five years and fines between 10,000 and 100,000 dirham (\$1,100 and \$11,000).

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Algeria: International Organizations Criticize Criminal Code

Members of the media watchdog group International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) criticized Algerian authorities for using the criminal code to jail journalists who report critically on the government and the military. In May and June, several journalists were convicted of criminal defamation and received prison sentences. There are also hundreds of cases pending against journalists. The Criminal Code was amended in 2001 to allow prison sentences of up to one year and substantial fines for defaming the president, the courts, the military, or parliament. For more information, click [here](#).

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Bahrain: Human Rights Protest, Political Institute Formed

Hundreds of human rights activists demonstrated in Manama in late June against Royal Decree no. 56 of 2002, which grants immunity to security officials who allegedly tortured detainees during the 1990s unrest in Bahrain. Click [here](#) to read a statement by the independent Bahrain Human Rights Society. Another royal decree issued on June 6 established the Bahrain Institute for Political Development, with the stated aim of promoting political awareness and supporting human rights. The Institute, under the jurisdiction of the Shura Council, will conduct research on constitutional and legal issues, train government officials, and offer support to non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Upcoming Political Events

- Iraq: Donors' Conference in Amman, July 18-19
- Egypt: Presidential Election, September
- Egypt: Parliamentary Elections, October/November

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Views from the Arab Media

A political debate show, "**Ma Wara Al Khabar**" (Behind the News) on satellite station *Al Jazeera* hosted a July 4 discussion on Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's intention to hold a referendum on an amnesty law that will grant exemption from prosecution to any member of an armed group, state-armed militia, or the security forces for crimes committed in the conflict that began in 1992. Former Minister of Information Mohyi Al Din Amaimur argued that it is a genuine attempt to launch a national reconciliation process to allow Algerians to put the past behind. Muhammad Al Arabi Zaitut, a former Algerian diplomat, strongly disagreed and said that he believes Bouteflika has undertaken this initiative for personal interests and has no intention of reforming Algerian society. He warned that a general amnesty for human rights abuses will permanently deprive victims or their families of their right to justice.

An **op-ed** article by Walid Choucair in *Al Hayat* on July 8 asserts that Lebanon is in dire need of a new cabinet. While the lengthy process of negotiation is normal in light of the events of the past six months, there are also pressing needs that cannot be postponed. These include the daunting economic challenges and the redefinition of Lebanese-Syrian political, economic, and security relations.

Shortly before the wholesale retirement of Egypt's senior editors, Chairman and Chief Editor of Egypt's state-run *Akhbar Al Youm*, Ibrahim Seada announced his resignation in a full front-page **editorial** June 18. Seada lashes out at state officials

such as Supreme Press Council Chair Safwat Al Sharif and criticizes bitterly a system that has made use of senior editors for many years and now is discarding them in order to appear reformist.

In Egypt 's independent daily *Al Masri Al Yawm* ("The Egyptian Today"), on June 14, columnist Magdi Mhanna delivers a scathing criticism of People's Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour. Mhanna accuses Sorour of being on a personal mission to destroy Egypt 's constitutional and legal framework by promoting laws that serve his personal interests rather than national interests. In his June 18 column, Mhanna lampoons Muhammad Kamal, a rising star in the NDP with special responsibility for political reform initiatives as the "new Kamal al-Shazli" (long-time NDP Deputy Secretary General).

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Read On

Two new publications focus on the **U.S. role** in promoting reform:

- "**In Support of Arab Democracy: Why and How**," a report released by a Council on Foreign Relations-sponsored Task Force on June 8, concludes that despite short-term risks, democracy in the Middle East is a desirable goal. The United States should promote evolutionary democratic development consistently throughout the region, mindful that democracy cannot be imposed from the outside and that sudden change is neither necessary nor desirable (Council on Foreign Relations, 2005).
- George Perkovich argues that the United States should expand its focus on the notion of freedom as the main objective of U.S. foreign policy. Pursuing justice as an equal priority would help neutralize opposition from radical Islamists and critics of globalization ("**Giving Justice Its Due**," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 4, July/August 2005, 79-93).

A new Freedom House study, "**Countries at the Crossroads 2005: A Survey of Democratic Governance**," assesses governance in 30 countries, including **Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Syria, and Tunisia**. The report evaluates countries according to four broad categories: rule of law, transparency and anti-corruption, governmental accountability, and civil liberties.

Alan Richards discusses prospects for "pacted transitions" to democracy in **Arab states** in "**Democracy in the Arab Region: Getting There from Here**" (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer 2005, 28-35). Since the most organized forces in Arab countries are those of political Islam, democratization would require that Islamist moderates be willing to play by democratic rules, convince reform elements within the state of their sincerity, and maintain control over radical allies.

Several new articles address the political situation in **Iraq** :

- Based on her experience as the Coalition Provisional Authority's Regional Coordinator in southern Iraq, Hilary Synnott finds many Coalition approaches to be ill-conceived and poorly executed. The Coalition lacked an accurate view of the political and socioeconomic situation in Iraq, failed to recognize the limits of its knowledge, and did not make contingency arrangements for dealing with the unforeseen ("**State-building in Southern Iraq**," *Survival*, vol. 47, no. 2, Summer 2005, 33-56).
- In "**Revisions in Need of Revising: What Went Wrong in the Iraq war**," David C. Hendrickson and Robert W. Tucker refute the argument that the United States squandered a historic opportunity to reconstruct the Iraqi state as a result of incompetence (*Survival*, vol. 47, no. 2, Summer 2005, 7-32). The problems the Bush administration has confronted came primarily from the enterprise itself and not from mistakes in execution.
- In "**Occupational Hazards**," Phebe Marr asserts that "rather than ponder the dos and don'ts of nation building, perhaps it would be wiser to weigh the whys and why nots of engaging in it in the first place" (*Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 4, July/August 2005, 180-86). She argues that Washington should look for ways to bring change to failing states before they warrant military intervention.
- Nathan Brown provides a translation and commentary of a draft bill of rights by a drafting subcommittee for the Iraqi constitution recently published by Iraqi newspaper *Al Mada* ("**Constitution of Iraq: Draft Bill of Rights**," Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace, July 2005).

Three publications evaluate developments in **Egypt**:

- In “Washington and Cairo—Near the Breaking Point?” Samuel J. Spector contends that as long as democracy promotion remains a major component of U.S. policy, diplomatic tensions between Cairo and Washington are likely to persist (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 3, Summer 2005, 45-55).
- Despite the stir caused by its mildly critical first report, Egypt's National Council for Human Rights is unlikely to serve as a check on the abuse of power in the country, argues Joshua A. Stacher in “**Rhetorical Acrobatics and Reputations: Egypt's National Council for Human Rights**” (*Middle East Report*, vol. 235, Summer 2005). Instead, the Council will serve as a “dynamic, albeit temporary, system maintenance mechanism.”
- In “**Egypt's Moment of Reform: A Reality or Illusion?**,” Emad El-Din Shahin, assesses the prospects for the democratic reform movement in Egypt ahead of the parliamentary and presidential elections (Center for European Policy Studies, Policy Brief, July 2005). He argues that in order to overcome the numerous challenges that the democratic movement faces and make reform a reality instead of yet another missed opportunity, certain structural changes and institutional safeguards should be introduced.

A number of publications examine the current situation in **Syria**:

- In “**U.S. Policy Toward a Weak Assad**,” Dennis Ross argues that now is not the time for the United States to launch a major new policy initiative toward Syria. The United States should continue to use a carrot-and-stick approach, but also should define more clearly what it is prepared to do to make Syria 's gains or losses meaningful (*The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, Summer 2005, 87-98).
- An article by Eyal Zisser “**Bashar Al Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?**” argues that there is no evidence of immediate danger to the Assad regime, despite the fact that President Al Assad has not managed to gain the legitimacy and public support enjoyed by his father. It remains unclear whether he has the power to implement reforms that would allow Syrians to benefit from globalization (*The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, Summer 2005, 115-31).
- In “**Bashar al-Assad's Lebanon Gamble**,” William Harris asserts that the loss of Syrian command in Lebanon may mark a psychological tipping point toward the overall erosion of Al Assad's authority, as control of Lebanon has long been fundamental to Syrian regional prestige and the regime's staying power (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 3, Summer 2005, 33-44).

Other writings discuss the future of **Lebanon** in light of recent legislative elections:

- In “**Lebanon at the Crossroads: Rebuilding An Arab Democracy**,” Paul Salem contends that Lebanon could be on the path to democracy if there are no major eruptions in Syria or south Lebanon. If U.S.-Syrian tensions escalate into pressures for regime change, a cornered Syria might lash out against Lebanon (Brookings Saban Center Middle East Memo no. 7, May 31, 2005).
- Sateh Noureddine and Laurie King-Irani argue that the parliamentary elections will not bring much change to the underlying political structures of the country. Syria 's withdrawal has thrown into sharp relief Lebanon 's quest to define itself as a modern state (“**Elections Pose Lebanon's Old Questions Anew**,” *Middle East Report Online*, May 31, 2005).

Curtis Ryan discusses how the current political crisis in **Jordan**—in which members of parliament have mobilized against the new government—is related to inconsistent steps regarding political reform (“**Reform Retreats Amid Jordan's Political Storms**,” *Middle East Report Online*, June 10, 2005).

The *Gulf Yearbook 2004* examines the most significant political, economic, social and security developments across the **Gulf Cooperation Council States, Iraq, Iran, and Yemen** in 2004 (Gulf Research Center, May 2005). A large part of the publication focuses on internal political developments through an analysis of constitutional and legal reforms as well as the changing role of legislative institutions.

Two articles discuss the situation of **women** in the region:

- Louay Bahry and Phebe Marr argue that while Qatari society continues to be conservative, boundaries relating to the status of women are expanding due to support from the ruling family as well as reform and social change in other Gulf states (“Qatari Women: A New Generation of Leaders?,” *Middle East Policy*, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer 2005, 104-19).
- In “The Human Rights of Women and Social Transformation in the Arab Middle East,” Hayat Alvi argues that the recent focus on signs of reforms and liberalization in the Arab world ignores evidence of regressive social trends, particularly attitudes and social policies that continue to deny women fundamental rights (*MERIA*, vol. 9, no. 2, June 2005, 142-60).

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Subscriber Information

Click [here](#) to receive the *Arab Reform Bulletin* via e-mail every month or to unsubscribe.

To subscribe to the Arabic edition of the *Bulletin*, click [here](#).

Click [here](#) to read past issues of the *Bulletin*.

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

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Copyright © 2005 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. All Rights Reserved.

URL: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=17183&prog=zgp&proj=zdrl>

Created by Matrix Group International, Inc. ®