

ON MESSAGE

Technology is often used to amplify religious messages, and the government of Morocco has gotten into the act. The country recently launched a program to augment teaching in many mosques with televisions. The move is part of Morocco's effort to promote tolerant Islam and curb militancy.

The \$1.25 million distance learning program puts televisions in 2,000 of the largest mosques in the kingdom, half of which are in rural areas. The televisions will broadcast daily sermons prepared by Islamic scholars under the guidance of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, as well as 10-minute sessions of Quranic interpretation. The government claims the program will reach some 80 percent of the Moroccan population. Soon, the televisions will come to prisons as well, where hundreds of accused Islamic militants are being held.

These efforts are not in isolation. Since the Casablanca bombings in 2003 that took 33 lives, the Moroccan government has been moving sharply to stamp out extremism in the religious sector. King Mohammed VI established a religious satellite television station and a religious radio station last year, and the government continues to broadcast its regular religious programming, including Friday sermons, nationwide.

The government does not have a completely open field. Bootleg tapes and CD's of unofficial preachers continue to be widely available in Morocco, and the result of its recent efforts are far more likely to be competition rather than swift victory. ■ -SA

A DIFFERENT CONFLICT

By Jon B. Alterman

As Israeli jets scream over Lebanon and Hezbollah rockets slam into Israeli cities, the Arab-Israeli conflict is not reverting to form. The current conflict is different, and it highlights how much Arab-Israeli politics have changed in recent years.

Israel has always portrayed itself as being surrounded by hostile states sworn to its destruction, and with good reason. It built a strong army to defend itself against these states and their proxies, and it fought war after war. Israel seized territory and it relinquished territory, and along the way, something interesting happened. The states on Israel's borders largely signed on to an agenda of coexistence. The Palestine Liberation Organization, long sworn to Israel's destruction, reconciled itself to claiming lands occupied in 1967 and in return was nurtured into being a proto-state. President Bush's stated desire in June 2002 to see "Two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security," wasn't visionary. It was merely an acknowledgment of where most governments in the region, and most Israelis and Palestinians, wanted negotiations to go.

Hamas' surprise victory in the Palestinian legislative elections changed the equation, because it meant that the Palestinian partner—surely necessary for Arab-Israeli peace—had dropped out. But something even more interesting happened. The Hamas-led Palestinian Authority found itself increasingly isolated around the world, because almost every state around the globe was hoping for its demise. Their enemies were not merely the Israelis and Americans—enemies they were counting on. Europeans were horrified by Hamas' endorsement of suicide attacks on Israeli civilians, eliminating one potential source of support. Arab governments hated them, too. They were chilled by the example of a popular Islamist opposition movement taking power, because it threatened to inspire the opposition in each and every one of their countries. They also believed Hamas was walking back from the consensus they had struck in Beirut in February 2002, agreeing to Israel's existence within its 1967 borders. Finally, a policy of defying the West seemed to most to be a dead end. Turning away from Western capital, Western military support, and Western help against domestic insurgencies was folly, because it would

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NEW ADDITION

The Middle East Program is delighted to welcome Gregory Brosman as the new program coordinator/research assistant. Greg recently graduated from Stanford University with a bachelor's degree with Honors in International Relations and a minor in Arabic. While a student, he studied abroad in Lebanon, Chile, and Oxford. This past year he conducted independent research in Jordan for his honors thesis on political mobilization in that country during the liberalization era. He replaces Mike Balz, who is moving on to pursue further Arabic language studies. You can reach Greg at (202) 775-3179 or gbrosman@csis.org ■

leave them even more vulnerable to people who wanted to toss them out. The regional governments have cast their lot with the West.

In many ways, that is precisely what the goal of Western policy had been for decades. Since the State of Israel was created in 1948, the international community had been trying to solve this conflict in the halls of government. That strategy is now in tatters. The groups Israel is fighting, Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon, are not state-like. The groups have made a living out of having few tangible assets to attack. In many ways, they exist principally as a set of ideas, wrapping up injustice, oppression, and overcoming weakness, and they enjoy wide support among their target communities. Bombs and armies cannot defeat their ideas.

They are not mere proxies, either. While they get support from Iran and Syria, their network of supporters inside and outside of the areas they control is significant. A strategy that principally consists of starving the beast through state action is unlikely to work. In addition, it is hard to think of how states with which Israel and its allies have relations can bring pressure to bear on these groups.

Israel, meanwhile, not only faces a deep strategic crisis, but also a political one. Ariel Sharon founded the centrist Kadima Party on the idea of unilateral withdrawal in order to gain peace. The resultant centrist government is now in battles in Gaza and Lebanon—two places from which Israel has unilaterally withdrawn. The party is in crisis, and the country has been stripped of the strategy on which Israelis had widely agreed only a few months ago.

Where Israel finds itself now is much where the United States found itself after September 11, as articulated in the two versions of the National Security Strategy the White House has issued since. National security threats from non-state actors are just as difficult as ones coming from states, and in many ways they are more difficult to resolve. The old notions of rogue states and state sponsors of terrorism break down in the face of complex networks of like-minded, but sometimes loosely coordinated groups. The solution is not so simple as negotiating with groups bent on their destruction—something Israel is unlikely to do, and should not do. At the same time, Israel and the international community need to recognize that what they are seeking is fundamentally a political outcome rather than a military one. Whereas in previous generations many believed that successful diplomatic negotiations would adequately address the needs of peace, the current conflict suggests that broader political support will need to be a part of any durable peace.

Armies can be extraordinarily effective fighting other armies, and in this regard Israel has no peer in the region. Yet, Israel's true goals cannot be achieved on the battlefield alone. If one outcome of the current fighting is a severe weakening of the Lebanese government, or a complete collapse of Palestinian governance, the resultant political consequences are more likely to harm Israeli interests than advance them. ■07/14/06

Links of Interest

Program Director Jon Alterman participated in a live question-and-answer session with The Washington Post on July 18 entitled "Middle East Conflict Grows":

http://www.csis.org/images/stories/mideast/060718_alterman_chat.pdf

Program Fellow Haim Malka was interviewed on Washington's WTOP radio station on the conflict in Lebanon:

<http://media.bonnint.net/wtop/2/263/26303.ram>

Jon Alterman was interviewed on CNN on the situation in Gaza:

<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0307/06/sun.05.html>

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Please visit our Web site at www.csis.org/mideast to learn more about the program's work.