



ATTACK ADS

Anyone hoping to enjoy a light-hearted hour of *Survivor Middle East* or *Lebanese Star Academy* this fall should be prepared for some sobering commercial breaks. That's because a shadowy organization called the Future Iraq Assembly has unleashed a big budget anti-terrorism ad campaign onto Arab airwaves.

The campaign consists of several television advertisements, as well as billboards, flyers, and a website. The flagship commercial, running on the most popular pan-Arab satellite television stations, is a sixty-second TV spot depicting an everyday market scene suddenly torn apart by a suicide bombing. The \$1 million ad is packed with special effects, including an ultra-slow motion sequence straight out of Hollywood. It goes on to show the wreckage of the bombing, and then fades to its tag line in Arabic script, "Terror Has No Religion."

Some question the effectiveness of the campaign. Lawrence Pintak of the American University in Cairo told the Associated Press that he believes the target audience will dismiss it for looking "too American." It doesn't help that the Future Iraq Assembly will not identify its membership and the U.S. government will neither confirm nor deny involvement. Many Arabs bristle at the very idea that the United States would be in a position to judge whether violence is justified or whether violent actions are Islamically sanctioned. ■-JS

ARAB DECISION 2007

By Jon B. Alterman

While it was U.S. voters who cast their ballots in last week's elections, Arabs may feel the election's most profound effects. For five years, the Bush Administration has dedicated itself to healing the Middle East so as to provide security at home. While U.S. voters did not directly repudiate the vision, they showed little support for the zeal with which the administration pursued it. With the U.S. push toward Arab reform stalled, Arabs—governments and publics—will find themselves facing harder choices, not easier ones. They took it for granted that the Bush Administration could not solve their problems, but they grew comfortable lining up in opposition to the long arm of U.S. intervention. In the aftermath of U.S. elections, the problems they face are as acute as ever, their awareness of those problems is higher, and they have lost their ability to tar reformists as American stooges. Their choices have become harder, not easier.

There is little question that President Bush and many in the White House continue to believe that the only truly strategic answer to the terrorist threat is attacking the conditions they see as giving rise to terrorism in the first place. In his speech on the fifth anniversary of September 11, President Bush concentrated on the cause of Middle Eastern democracy, saying that when hope and freedom prevailed in the region, "the clouds of war will part, the appeal of radicalism will decline, and we will leave our children with a better and safer world." He centered his address to the United Nations General Assembly later in September on his "freedom agenda" as well, arguing, "We know that when people have a voice in their future, they are less likely to blow themselves up in suicide attacks." The President's vision is clear.

Still, what should one make of the ways in which widely heralded elections in Iraq and Palestine yielded armed conflict verging on civil war and put militias at the heart of political power? How should one analyze the dashed hopes of last year's elections in Egypt, widely heralded as a test case for U.S. policy? The transatlantic initiatives of the G8's 2004 Sea Island Summit have all but been forgotten, and the

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RELEASE OF *ARAB REFORM AND FOREIGN AID*

On October 30, the Middle East Program held the official release of *Arab Reform and Foreign Aid: Lessons from Morocco*. Haim Malka and Jon Alterman co-wrote the book, basing its findings on a trip they led to Morocco early this year with a dozen representatives of think tanks and universities from the United States and Europe. The book analyzes Morocco's prospects for political reform and makes constructive recommendations for how international cooperation can help maximize Morocco's opportunities for success. The project was a joint effort of the CSIS Middle East and Europe Programs. To learn more or purchase the book, visit the program's website at www.csis.org/mideast. ■

bold new programming of the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative has morphed into a set of comfortable projects that are often indistinguishable from traditional USAID assistance. However attractive the President's rhetoric, it has been mugged by reality.

Even so, something is afoot in the Middle East. Too many young people still clamor for too few jobs, and government services groan under burgeoning populations. Public educational systems are mostly broken, and in many countries, wages lag behind rising expenses. Regional governments make solemn international proclamations, but they rarely seem to be able to shape world events in a constructive way. Increasingly, publics complain their governments have been successful at self-preservation, but too little else.

And complain they do, and not only to friends in private. On satellite television, on the Internet, on cassettes, videotapes, and DVD's, the complaints are piling up. Censorship is dying in the Middle East, and even surveillance is getting harder. Unprecedented criticism is in the air.

With that criticism comes a renewed sense of seriousness. The Middle East is in the midst of a remarkable economic boom, driven by high oil prices. It is almost like the halcyon days of the 1970s, but with a couple of twists. First, everyone expects that, one day, this oil boom will end. Second, most look back on the flush days of the 1970s and regret that they were not able to use that window to build stronger economies and better workforces. While few would call the opportunity completely squandered, there is a keen desire to invest in a serious way and do better this time.

There is a rising tide in the Middle East. It is not demanding more liberal, or more personal autonomy; it is demanding better results. This tide unites liberals and conservatives, secular and religious forces. In many cases, it includes younger government officials as well, who contrast the burgeoning Asian economies with the rigid structures of the Middle East. Regional governments know their public sectors are far too big (in several cases employing upwards of 90 percent of the native workforce), and that they must use the opportunity the current boom provides to create a more vibrant private sector. Political reform is a potential but not inevitable consequence of the changes they demand. Asia has several examples of effective governments that are not very open—Singapore springs to mind—but it has even more examples such as Taiwan and South Korea where economic growth helped nurture a more open government.

The United States is a minor player in this unfolding drama, and perhaps that is best. The United States is often like a force field in the Middle East now, distorting everything that it comes near. Having helped open the topic of change in the Middle East, the topic now has a life of its own. While the Bush Administration is likely to be a less zealous advocate for the next two years, and its successor less zealous still, the hard choices remain where they should be, with the peoples and governments of the region itself. The United States will step away, but the hard choices for the Middle East have only begun. ■11/16/06

Links of Interest

Jon Alterman discussed the situation in Iraq during a [WTOP interview](#)

The website for the "Terrorism has no religion" campaign:
www.noterror.info

Launch of *Arab Reform and Foreign Aid: Lessons from Morocco*
www.csis.org/mideast/northafrica

The website of a message board in Saudi Arabia that details economic problems and unemployment in the Kingdom:
www.btalah.com

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