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Stop the Broadcasts of Al-Qaeda's TV Propaganda

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The United States has, for some time, found itself a step behind radical terrorist groups in information warfare. Now comes the troubling news that an Iraqi group affiliated with al-Qaeda has taken another step forward with its own 24-hour television station, al-Zawraa. The U.S. should attempt to halt satellite distribution of this network and refocus its public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East.

Al-Zawraa, operated by the Baathist-backed Islamic Army of Iraq, has been broadcasting terrorist propaganda out of a secret location in Syria since November 2006. According to a recent article, al-Zawraa is carried by the Egyptian state-owned satellite company Nilesat, which can broadcast the television channel across the entire Middle East.¹

Though much of the media in the region has portrayed the U.S. in a less-than-positive light, al-Zawraa has gone a step further: promoting violence against the U.S. in Iraq by using the images of “destroyed mosques, dead women and children, women weeping at the death of their family, bloodstained floors, the destruction of U.S. humvees and armored vehicles, and insurgents firing mortars, RPGs, rockets and AK-47s,” according to military blogger Bill Roggio, who reported from Fallujah.²

In an ideological conflict where emotionally charged televised propaganda can make a profound difference, the U.S. must not stand idly by and allow this hostile television station to operate with-

out challenge or consequence. There is a clear difference between broadcasting alternative points of view and encouraging violence. To prevent the brainwashing of Arab Nilesat subscribers, the U.S. and Iraqi governments should seek to jam Al-Zawraa's signal to the Nilesat satellite.

The U.S. should also forcefully press the Egyptian government, which is the leading owner in the Nilesat consortium, to halt Nilesat's distribution of such inflammatory propaganda. President Mubarak should appreciate the dangers of contributing to al-Qaeda's propaganda program, as he was nearly assassinated by al-Qaeda. If Cairo refuses to take action, Washington should consider cuts to Egypt's foreign aid, currently running at nearly \$2 billion per year.

Finally, the U.S. must refocus its public diplomacy efforts. Stations like al-Zawraa do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they enjoy state support and the patronage of thousands of individuals who watch their vitriolic messages day after day. If the U.S. is incapable of developing alternative media with its local partners, it will continue to fall behind in this critical area of outreach to the Islamic community.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/MiddleEast/wm1312.cfm

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Against an agile enemy like al-Qaeda, the information war will prove to be a difficult conflict. But if the U.S. becomes more proactive and creative, it will do much better in the war of ideas, a critical front in the Long War against terrorism.

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1. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nick Grace, "Al Qaeda TV," *The Weekly Standard*, January 3, 2006, at www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/013/127nftww.asp.
 2. Bill Roggio, "al-Zawraa: Muj TV," December 10, 2006, at billroggio.com/archives/2006/12/muj_tv.php.

