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War of Ideas Update: U.S. 1, Insurgents 1 ^[1]

Egypt this week pulled the plug on al-Zawraa, the controversial channel controlled by Iraq's Sunni insurgency, but it is still available across the Middle East thanks to America's Gulf allies.

The channel broadcasts non-stop footage of attacks on U.S. troops interwoven with verbal attacks on Iran and Shiites, like Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who it accuses of being loyal to Iran. Since its launch in mid-November, al-Zawraa has been distributed by Nilesat, a satellite provider controlled by the Egyptian government.

The U.S. has been working behind the scenes to convince Egypt to pull the plug. The Egyptians have been insisting Nilesat is a private company and it's "just business." In recent days, according to the pan-Arab newspaper Asharq Alawsat, the Nilesat feed of al-Zawraa has been intermittently jammed by an unknown signal. Early this week, ostensibly because it couldn't counter the jamming, Egypt pulled the plug. The space on the dial once occupied by al-Zawraa is now dark.

But viewers who still want their fix of anti-American mayhem need only surf a few dozen spots up the dial to a channel bouncing off a satellite owned by the Dubai-based Arabsat company.

Saudi-controlled Arabsat began relaying al-Zawraa's signal last month at the height of U.S. pressure on the Egyptians. The hosting of the Sunni insurgent channel by the U.S. allies appears part of the growing Cold War between Sunni Arab regimes and Iran. Late last month, Al-Zawraa also briefly appeared on a European satellite owned by Paris-based Eutelsat Communications, lending credence to Jaburi's earlier claim that he had cut other distribution deals as backup to the Egypt relationship.

But it's not all bad news for the Bush administration. Al-Zawraa has also declared war on Al-Qaeda. Mishan al-Jaburi, the exiled Iraqi member of parliament who runs the channel, recently went on the air and launched a bitter attack on al-Qaeda in Iraq for the killing of Sunni Muslim tribal elders who refused to cooperate with its forces.

Jaburi, whose footage comes from elements of the Sunni insurgency that include former pro-Saddam Baathists, promised the insurgency would launch attacks against al-Qaeda if it didn't stop using threats and collusion to force Iraqi Sunnis to do its bidding.

Now that's the kind of psychological warfare the Pentagon psyops folks should actually pay for.

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