

BLUE MAN GROUPS

Blue men aren't limited to Las Vegas anymore. Guides decked out in the traditional indigo robes and scarves of the Sahara desert's Touareg nomads—the "Blue Men of the Desert"—are all the rage in Morocco. By wearing traditional nomadic clothing, Moroccan guides and hotel owners hope to lure tourists by exploiting the Touareg's exotic image. Yet there is one problem with this apparent cultural renaissance: it is all an invention. Touaregs are not from Morocco. They are part of an Amazeigh tribe native to Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Libya. Nevertheless, faux Touaregs have flourished in recent years, and many tourist destinations in Morocco's south have begun claiming the Touaregs' heritage and history as their own.

Cultural tourism is nothing new in the Middle East, nor is inventing traditions. Belly dancing, after all, was invented in nineteenth-century Egypt for the tourist trade. In Morocco, cultural tourism's appeal has grown under King Mohammed VI's plan to increase the tourism sector by 15 percent annually, with the ultimate goal of bringing in 10 million tourists by the year 2010. This focus on tourism is part of a wider strategy to modernize and develop an economy hard hit by droughts and high urban unemployment.

The tourism component is already bearing fruit, as two UAE companies have committed \$20 billion in tourism investments over the next three years in Morocco. How much of that will reach Morocco's actual nomads remains to be seen. ■-TS

MUSLIM NETWORKS

By Jon B. Alterman

Sitting in Washington, it is easy to lose touch with the world. Comfortable with understandings and contacts nurtured over decades, one can get taken by surprise. September 11 was an instance of one such surprise; most Middle East and security experts knew about al-Qaeda, but few thought the organization could be such a deadly foe. Another surprise was the depth of difficulties that the United States encountered as it pushed for democracy in the Middle East—an effort that, in retrospect, relied far more on U.S. hopes and good intentions than a clear understanding of how Arab governments actually work.

The issues are not ones of willful ignorance or malicious intent. They are simply a product of the fact that exceedingly few U.S. officials, experts, and academics had any contact with radicals, and many had a tremendous amount of contact with secular, liberal elites who bemoaned their countries' authoritarian systems. Americans valued most what they knew personally, and in that way, the United States was a prisoner of its sources.

Those same blind spots are keeping many Americans from even knowing about one of the most important phenomena in the Muslim world today. A growing number of networks reach across national boundaries and spread ideas, attitudes, and allegiances among Muslim communities. These networks link Muslims to one another with an intimacy and an intensity that could scarcely be conceived a decade ago, yet few non-Muslim Americans perceive these networks at all. These transnational organizations—ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world to the Muhammadiyah in Indonesia to the various ancient Sufi orders that can be found within and between many Muslim-majority countries—encompass hundreds of millions of the world's Muslims in different ways, linking them to one another and having a profound effect on how they see themselves, their neighbors, their countries, and their world.

In a way, Islam was the original network, and its notion of an *umma*, or global community of Muslims with a shared fate and a shared common responsibility, dates back to the times of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet even for many older networks, their modes of recruitment, communication, and information distribution are state of the art. They effectively use the Internet and satellite television, and link both to databases and personal contact networks that would make U.S. political campaigns envious. Regardless of the ways in which they

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IRAN AND THE STRUGGLE FOR GULF SUPREMACY

Gary Sick, a senior research scholar at Columbia University, and Afshin Molavi, a fellow at the New America Foundation, addressed CSIS' second Gulf Roundtable about Iran's changing position in the Gulf. Molavi and Sick outlined three key arenas where Iran's presence is increasingly being felt: economically, diplomatically, and militarily. Yet Washington's responses have not fully met the Iranian challenge in the Gulf. Sick argued that instead there may be significant space for bilateral cooperation with Iran. Both speakers remained critical of the likelihood or success of a U.S. or Israeli strike on the Iranian nuclear program. For the full summary please click [HERE](#). ■

cloak themselves in tradition and heritage, many of these networks are among the most modern organizations in the world—they are adaptive, dynamic and highly opportunistic, and their religious tinge gives them legitimacy and builds on a common identity.

To begin to gain an understanding of these networks, CSIS held a small conference last month that encompassed regional programs reaching from Africa to Southeast Asia. Bringing together experts on (and in many cases, from) Muslim-majority countries, the scholars found profound similarities in many of the groups they studied. The grievances in country after country were the same: a sense that the West disrespects Islam, that injustice is rampant, and that many of the governments with large Muslim populations are both illegitimate and ineffective. The narratives of many of these groups are similar, too: that they have suffered from a historical injustice, retribution is in order, moral purification is necessary, and that the West is mostly hypocritical when it comes to Muslims and the regimes that rule them.

While many of these groups are non-violent, in recent years they have exhibited a general tendency away from tolerance toward chauvinism, sectarianism, and an acceptance of violence. Some participants in the CSIS conference saw the alarming rise of new strains of Islam that were simultaneously cosmopolitan and exclusivist, representing a radical departure from Islam's traditionally fluid and pluralistic tradition.

One of the most striking phenomena occurring now is the way in which the growing web of networks creates a competition for authority between a diverse array of potential actors. On the religious front alone, the competition spans official government clerics such as religious affairs ministers and muftis, independent clerics such as the Egyptian-born and Qatari-based Yusuf Qaradawi, and non-clerical authorities with global reach such as Amr Khaled of Egypt and Europe's Tariq Ramadan. They all speak in the name of Islam to Muslim audiences. More importantly, they all speak at the same time, giving their followers—and potential followers—a range of possible views on matters of the day. The competition for authority seems to be converging on a common point, which is a common aspiration to bring modernity together with faith and equity. Can it be any coincidence that many Muslim opposition parties from Morocco to Turkey and beyond share the same name: "Justice and Development"? Their name both highlights the failings of the current government to provide either, and the shared aspirations of their people.

Although we still only have a dim inkling of many of these movements, the implications are clear. First, that politics are in a state of flux in many of these countries, and religiously-leaning groups have robust networks and seem destined to come out on top of liberal secular parties. Publics consider liberal secularists not only old-fashioned and corrupt, but also to have failed. They have few young adherents, and few young leaders.

Second, the Western strategy of coercing radicals and wooing moderates has not worked. If we are to judge by the last five years, one of its principal consequences has been to fuel radicalism and discredit moderates. Radicals have more robust networks than many of the moderates, and the Western actors have often considered centrist religious networks—which they often see as both conservative and hostile—as either irrelevant or beyond the pale.

Finally, the Bush Administration's five-year focus on freedom and democratization has both failed to win friends and failed to promote desired change. Really listening to the voices coming out of these networks, the United States is both off-message and out of step. People do not need to be told they want better lives; they know that already. The true hunger is not so much for freedom, but for justice. To the minds of many, U.S. behavior has demonstrated a pointed indifference to their aspirations. To tap into these growing networks, the United States needs to adjust not just its words, but also its deeds. ■ 6/20/07

Links of Interest

[The Middle East Program hosted Marc Lynch](#), an associate professor at George Washington University, for a talk entitled "Jihad Online" as part of its Congressional Forum on Islam.

The Middle East Program was quoted on the Gaza situation by the [Los Angeles Times](#), [CNN](#), [ABC](#), [Fox News](#), and the [Washington Post](#).

[Statesmen's Forum](#): Ronald Neumann, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, spoke about the challenges ahead in Afghanistan.

[Jon Alterman spoke on CSIS TV](#) regarding the internet and jihadis.

[The CSIS Energy Program hosted Tariq E. Shafiq](#), one of the authors of the Iraq hydrocarbon law, for a discussion about the law's importance and its implementation.

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