

## Are the Radicals Winning?

CSIS Congressional Forum on Islam

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*Jihadis are on the defensive in much of the world. U.S. military campaigns against radical groups have decimated their capacities. Israel has been less successful, however, delivering a strategic defeat to Hamas and Hezbollah. As these organizations gain more influence and credibility with Muslims throughout the Middle East, Israel may find itself the next target of a region-wide jihadi movement.*

### KEY POINTS

- The consistent and overwhelming U.S. application of force has helped deliver a strategic defeat to al Qaeda and its allies. Though challenges remain, al Qaeda is much weaker than it was five years ago in places such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and many of bin Laden's allies have deserted him.
- Israel has failed to defeat its own radical enemies, primarily Hamas and Hizbullah. The reason is that it continues to fight these organizations with "one hand tied behind its back." Consequently, the organizations have become stronger and are undergoing a transition from terror organizations to military organizations based in mini-states.
- At the core of Israel's difficulty is that it is trying to negotiate peace and wage war simultaneously. By dabbling in both, it is doing neither successfully. A massive show of force in Gaza would allow Israel to negotiate from a position of strength rather than weakness.
- Hamas and Hizbullah have effectively exploited President Bush's democracy agenda in the region. Their participation in politics has conferred some immunity and made them harder to combat militarily.
- The difference between the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, where the U.S. was able to "turn" many of its former enemies through engagement, and Israel's battles is that Iraqi insurgents lacked an underlying ideology and could therefore be turned more easily. Further, the U.S. would not have engaged merely to reach a "cease fire."
- Israel is showing restraint now because it doesn't want to leave the region in flames as President Bush leaves office.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- It is not enough to encourage moderate factions; radical groups must be confronted directly and defeated using massive military force.
- Negotiations and ceasefires with radical groups only forestall the inevitable confrontations which these groups seek.
- Cooperation among U.S. allies is vital to countering the gains made by Hamas, Hizbullah, and other radical groups.

*For more information about the series or to be included in future invitations, please contact Louis Lauter at [llauter@csis.org](mailto:llauter@csis.org) or (202) 775-3186.*

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