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## S.F. network opens window into the Middle East

**NON-PROFIT LINKS U.S. SATELLITE TV WITH ARAB WORLD, ISRAEL**

By Dana Hull  
*Mercury News*

One television monitor shows CNN with its "Showdown Iraq" logo. On another, an anchor on Lebanon's Al-Manar TV, a privately owned station controlled by the fundamentalist movement Hezbollah, talks about diplomatic wrangling at the United Nations. On a third screen, a Baghdad correspondent from the United Arab Emirates' Abu Dhabi TV gives a live report.

They're all playing on a bank of monitors at WorldLink TV, a non-profit network based in San Francisco that makes news broadcasts from the Arab world and Israel available to satellite TV subscribers in the United States. WorldLink takes news programs from 16 foreign stations from Egypt to Israel to Syria, adds English voiceovers and transmits a repackaged program called "Mosaic" to households with satellite dishes. The half-hour program, aired five days a week, gives Americans who don't speak Arabic or Hebrew a rare window into the Middle East.



RICK E. MARTIN - MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

"After September 11, a lot of people asked, 'Why do they hate us?'" said David Michaelis, a veteran Israeli journalist who is WorldLink's director of current affairs. "You will never understand that if you only watch American television. To understand how America is viewed in the Middle East, you need to watch the media that they are seeing."

Except for English translations, Mosaic leaves the news broadcasts from other countries in their original form, without commentary or analysis. The segments are edited for time so that each show contains footage from stations across the region.

That footage is far more graphic and bloody than what is usually seen in the United States. When a suicide bomb explodes on a bus in

Jerusalem, the Israel Broadcasting Authority quickly rushes to the scene. When the Israeli military fires missiles into a village in the West Bank, Palestine Television, the official station of the Palestinian National Authority in Gaza, often shows images of bloody Palestinians with missing limbs being rushed to the hospital. Mosaic airs both.

"It's not easy to watch it, but it's really important to compare perspectives," Michaelis said. "The pictures are brutal because people are so used to violence in the Middle East."

WorldLink is operated by Link Media, a non-profit company formed through a partnership of four independent media organizations. Its board of directors includes prominent progressives and human rights advocates, from Carl Pope

# MOSAIC Window to the Mideast

the Sierra Club to William Schulz of Amnesty International. WorldLink specializes in documentaries on global issues, foreign feature films, and world music, and its target audience is decidedly liberal. The network's Web site says it "serves the millions of Americans who desire to make positive change in our world."

Mosaic is available to the 20 million U.S. households that have satellite dishes. A consultant estimates that 2.9 million households have watched WorldLink, but the network doesn't know how many dish owners watch the Mosaic program. Some of Mosaic's episodes can also be viewed via videostreaming on the Web at [www.worldlinktv.org](http://www.worldlinktv.org).

Alice Nashashibi pays \$65 a month for her package of programming on the DISH Network and watches Mosaic most days. "You get more detailed news about what is happening in the Middle East than you do on the American channels," said Nashashibi, a San Francisco resident who grew up in a Lebanese-American household but is not fluent in Arabic. "It's in English, and there are no commercials. I just wish they had it on regular TV instead of only on satellite."

Many Americans have heard of Al-Jazeera, the independent TV network based in Qatar. Al-Jazeera has been criticized for its anti-American commentary and for airing videotaped statements from Osama bin Laden that praised the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

But Al-Jazeera is just one of a number of networks accessible by satellite in the Middle East, where cable television is not readily available. And while Al-Jazeera is an independent network that is often critical of Arab governments, WorldLink has agreements with 16 primarily state-owned broadcasters to use their programming.

"In the United States, you watch cable and go from Fox to CNN," said Jamal Dajani, a Palestinian-American who is Mosaic's producer. "The average Arab viewer is not flipping between channels but countries. A family in Morocco may regularly watch Lebanese TV. There are major differences between what is seen here and what is seen there."

Mosaic's staff consists of four full-time and three part-time employees. Much of the work consists of watching and logging hours of video footage at WorldLink's Battery Street studio and deciding which stories should make the show.

Recently, most of the Middle Eastern stations carried live footage of a U.N. Security Council meeting in New York. One television monitor out of the 14 in the studio was starkly different: the state network operated by the Iraqi News Agency aired a segment alleging that the United States plans to come and steal the country's vast oil reserves, and made no mention of the U.N. meeting.