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### Gestalt Analysis & The War on Terrorism

Your daily newspaper is made up of a collection of articles that generally have no particular relationship to one another. At times, an editor will group an article with another sidebar story that sheds additional light on the topic. However, editors generally group stories in order of importance—the stories that are deemed most important appear on page 1, the next most important are found on page 2...and so on.

However, by activating our *gestalt*—or predisposition to order—the reader can sometimes uncover significant connections between the stories that appear throughout the newspapers.

An example of this gestalt analysis can be found in the November 16<sup>th</sup> edition of the *New York Times*. Five stories, scattered throughout the 24 page news section, convey a cumulative message with regard to the worldwide Islamic Fundamentalist movement.

- The lead article on page 1A (‘‘Mil­itants Gain Despite Decree by Musharraf’’) discusses recent inroads by the Islamic militants into Pakistan:

But in the last several days, the militants have extended their reach, capturing more territory in Pakistan’s settled areas and chasing away frightened policemen, local government officials said.

- An article on page 4 (‘‘Jordan’s Islamists Seek Offices Their Allies Scorn’’) chronicles recent political gains by the Islamic Action Front. This

political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood commands almost unanimous support in the city of Zarqa. This industrial city, with 834,000 residents, is just a fifteen minute drive from the capital, Amman. The article profiles one voter, Maysoon al-Medhoon, who the reporters cite as reflecting a typical attitude:

One such voter is Maysoon al-Medhoon, 28, who waited nearly three hours in a friend's apartment in Zarqa for the opportunity to question the candidate. Ms. Medhoon supports the Islamic Action Front, but only as a temporary salve until Jordan, and the rest of the Muslim world, witnesses a religious revolution that will solve the people's problems.

'Islam is the only real force for change,' she said.  
'Islam is the solution for everything.'

- The third article, on page A6 ("Abbas Calls for Ouster of Hamas 'Gang' From Gaza") focuses on reactions to the outbreak of violence in Gaza between the relatively pro-Western Fatah party and the more radical fundamentalist Hamas, which was voted into office last year. The story relates that Mahamoud Abbas president and the leader of Fatah, is calling for the ouster of Hamas from power in Gaza "We must topple this gang that took control of the Gaza Strip by force and that is exploiting the suffering and tragedies of our people."
- Page 8 contains an article ("Indonesia Bans Sects It Deems Blasphemous") which reports that Indonesia has recently arrested several Islamic leaders and banned their organizations. In response, human rights lawyers in Indonesia are questioning Indonesia's commitment to religious freedom.

- Another article that appears on page 8 (“The Philippines: Deal on a Muslim Homeland Reported”) reports that the Philippine government has ceded land to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the country’s main Islamic separatist group. “‘Demarcation has been agreed,’ Rodolfo Garcia, the chief government negotiator, said at the end of two days of talks in Kuala Lumpur with officials from the front.”

Taken collectively, these articles tell the story of a worldwide Islamic movement that is making serious inroads in countries throughout the world. In some cases, these gains are being made militarily (Pakistan). In others, Islamic groups are making inroads through political means (Jordan and Palestine). In one country, the government (Indonesia) is cracking down on Islamic groups—even committing human rights abuses in the process-- in an effort to control their growth and influence, while in another (the Philippines), the country has acknowledged the power and influence of Islamic groups by ceding territory to them.

Thus, a gestalt analysis is a critical approach that enables readers to identify thematic connections between the stories that appear in the newspaper. In this case, this gestalt analysis provides an answer to the question whether the U.S. is winning the war on terrorism.

