

Militanewy

# How to win the



By Fared Zakaria

*Britain, the US and most other countries have not found it easy to address the root causes of jihad*

**R**EPUBLICANS and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, are strangely united on one point: the threat from global jihad is growing dangerously. Republicans use that belief as a way to remind the American people that we live in a fearsome world — and need tough leaders to protect us. For Democrats, the same idea fortifies their claim that the Bush administration has failed to deal with a crucial threat — and that we need a new national-security team. Terrorism experts and the media add to this chorus, consciously or not, because they have an incentive to paint a grim picture: bad news sells. Amid the clamor, it is difficult to figure out what is actually going on.

In the two decades before 9/11, Islamic radicalism flourished, while most governments treated it as a minor annoyance rather than a major security threat. September 11 changed all that, and subsequent bombings in Bali, Casablanca,

Riyadh, Madrid and London forced countries everywhere to rethink their basic attitude. Now most governments around the world have become far more active in pursuing, capturing, killing and disrupting terrorist groups of all kinds. The result is an enemy that is without question weaker than before, though also more decentralised and amorphous.

Consider the news from just the past few months. In Indonesia, the largest Muslim nation in the world, the government announced that on June 9 it had captured both the chief and the military leader of Jemaah Islamiah, the country's deadliest jihadist group and the one that carried out the Bali bombings of 2002. In January, Filipino troops killed Abu Sulaiman, leader of the Qaeda-style terrorist outfit Abu Sayyaf. The Philippine Army — with American help — has battered the group, whose membership has declined from as many as 2,000 guerrillas six years ago to a few hundred today. In Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which were Al Qaeda's original bases and targets of attack, terrorist cells have been rounded up, and those still at large have been unable to launch any major new attacks in a couple of years. There, as elsewhere, the efforts of finance ministries — most especially the US Department of the Treasury — have made life far more difficult for terrorists. Global organisations cannot thrive without being able to move money around. The more that terrorists' funds are tracked and targeted, the more they have to make do with small-scale and hastily improvised operations.

North Africa has seen an uptick in

activity, particularly Algeria. But the main group there, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (known by its French abbreviation, GSPC), is part of a long and ongoing local war between the Algerian government and Islamic opposition forces and cannot be seen solely through the prism of Al Qaeda or anti-American jihad. This is also true of the main area where there has been a large and troubling rise in the strength of Al Qaeda — the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands. It is here that Al Qaeda Central, if there is such an entity, is housed. But the reason the group has been able to sustain itself and grow despite the best efforts of NATO troops is that through the years of

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the anti-Soviet campaign, Al Qaeda dug deep roots in the area. And its allies the Taliban are a once popular local movement that has long been supported by a section of the Pashtuns, an influential ethnic group in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In Iraq, where terrorist attacks are a daily event, another important complication weakens the enemy. From a broad coalition promising to unite all Muslims, Al Qaeda has morphed into a purist Sunni group that spends most of its time killing Shiites. In its original fatwas and other statements, Al Qaeda makes no mention of Shiites, condemning only the "Crusaders" and "Jews". But Iraq



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changed things. Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, the head of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, bore a fierce hatred for Shiites, derived from his Wahhabi-style puritanism. In a February 2004 letter to Osama bin Laden, he claimed that "the danger from the Shia ... is greater ... than the Americans ... (T)he only solution is for us to strike the religious, military and other cadres among the Shia with blow after blow until they bend to the Sunnis." If there ever had been a debate between him and bin Laden, Zarqawi won. As a result, an organisation that had hoped to rally the entire Muslim world to jihad against the West has been dragged instead into a

dangerous if Western leaders recognised this and worked to emphasize such distinctions. Rather than speaking of a single worldwide movement — which absurdly lumps together Chechen separatists in Russia, Pakistani-backed militants in India, Shiite warlords in Lebanon and Sunni jihadists in Egypt — we should be emphasizing that all these groups are distinct, with differing agendas, enemies and friends. That robs them of their claim to represent Islam. It describes them as they often are — small local gangs of misfits, hoping to attract attention through nihilism and barbarism.

The greatest weakness of militant

some 600 million people. In those elections over the past four or five years, the parties representing militant Islam have done poorly from Indonesia to Pakistan, rarely garnering more than 7 or 8 percent of the vote. There are some exceptional cases in places suffering from civil war or occupation, such as Hamas in the Palestinian territories and Hizbullah in Lebanon. But by and large, radical Islam is not winning the argument, which is why it is trying to win by force.

If this sounds like an optimistic account, it is, up to a point. The real danger, and the reason this will be a long struggle, is that the conditions that feed the radicalisation and alienation of young Muslim men are not abating. A toxic combination of demography, alienation and religious extremism continues to seduce a small number of Muslims to head down a path of brutal violence. And technology today — most worryingly the large quantities of loose nuclear material throughout the world — ensures that small numbers of people can do large amounts of damage.

The current issue of Britain's Prospect magazine has a deeply illuminating profile of the main suicide bomber in the 7/7 London subway attacks, Mohammed Siddique Khan, who at first glance appeared to be a well-integrated, middle-class Briton. The author, Shiv Malik, spent months in the Leeds suburb where Khan grew up, talked to his relatives and pieced together his past. Khan was not driven to become a suicide bomber by poverty, racism or the Iraq War. His is the story of

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dirty internal war within Islam.

The split between Sunnis and Shiites — which plays a role in Lebanon as well — is only one of the divisions within the world of Islam. Within that universe are Shiites and Sunnis, Persians and Arabs, Southeast Asians and Middle Easterners and, importantly, moderates and radicals. The clash between Hamas and Fatah in the Palestinian territories is the most vivid sign of the latter divide. Just as the diversity within the communist world ultimately made it less threatening, so the many varieties of Islam weaken its ability to coalesce into a single, monolithic foe. It would be even less

Islam is that it is unpopular almost everywhere. Even in Afghanistan, where the Taliban has some roots, it was widely reviled. And now, when Taliban fighters occasionally take over a town in southern Afghanistan, they disband the schools, burn books, put women behind veils. These actions cause fear and resentment, not love. Most Muslims, even those who are devout and enraged at the West, don't want to return to some grim fantasy of medieval theocracy. People in the Muslim world travel to see the glitz in Dubai, not the madrasas in Tehran. About half the world's Muslim countries hold elections — representing

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by a young man who found he could not be part of the traditional Pakistani-immigrant community of his parents. He had no memories of their Pakistani life. He spoke their language, Urdu, poorly. He rejected an arranged marriage in favour of a love match. And yet, he was also out of place in modern British culture. Khan was slowly seduced by the simple, powerful and total world view of Wahhabi Islam, conveniently provided in easy-to-read English pamphlets (doubtless funded with Saudi money). The ideology fulfilled a young man's desire for protest and rebellion and at the same time gave him a powerful sense of identity. By 1999 — before the Iraq War, before 9/11 — he was ready to be a terrorist.

Britain, the United States and most other countries have not found it easy to address the root causes of jihad. But clearly, they relate to the alienation, humiliation and disempowerment caused by the pace of change in the modern world — economic change, migration from Third World to First World, movement from the countryside to the city. The only durable solution to these ongoing disruptions is for these people to see themselves — and, most important, the societies they come from and still identify with — as masters of the modern world and not as victims. How to open up and modernise the Muslim world is a long, hard and complex challenge. But surely one key is to be seen by these societies and peoples as partners and friends, not as bullies and enemies. That is one battle we are not yet winning. **COURTESY NEWSWEEK**