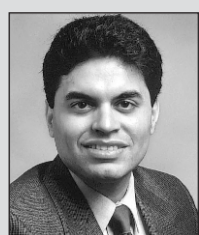


# The radicals are desperate



**FAREED ZAKARIA**  
writes from Washington

If you're wondering how al Qaeda and its type of militant Islamic groups are doing these days, there was interesting news last week. The tragic bombings of Shiites during their Ashura commemoration, apparently planned by one such group, exposed the weakness of the radicals. That Islamic extremist groups are now targeting Shiites is surely a sign of desperation. Unable to launch major terrorist attacks in the West, unable to attract political support in the Middle East,

militant Islam is searching for enemies and causes.

Consider the progress of al Qaeda and affiliated terror groups over the past three years. For a decade they had attacked high-profile American targets only -- embassies, a naval destroyer, the World Trade Centre. Once the United States mobilised against them, and got the world to join that fight, what have they hit? A discotheque, a few synagogues, a couple of restaurants and hotels, all

new "message" from al Qaeda and analysts ponder what it portends. By now surely it is clear that al Qaeda can produce videotapes but not terrorism. In fact, their poorly produced tapes, threatening spectacular attacks, are becoming a joke, much like Saddam Hussein's promises to fight "the mother of all battles."

In political terms they have fared even worse. Support for violent Islam is waning in almost all major Muslim

and the moderates on the rise. This does not mean that there will be rapid reform anywhere -- but there are many obstacles to progress -- but it does suggest that the moderates are not running scared anymore.

All religious extremists need enemies to thrive. Christian fundamentalists used to rant against Jews and Catholics until that became politically impossible. Now they warn of the takeover of the country by abortionists, gays and secular

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soft targets that could not even be protected, and all outside the Western world. As a result, the terrorists have killed mostly Muslims, which is marginalising them in the world of Islam.

Every few months we hear of a

countries. Discussions from Libya to Saudi Arabia are all about liberalisation. Ever since September 11, when the spotlight has been directed on these societies and their dysfunctions laid bare to the world, it is the hard-liners who are in retreat

humanists. And even that tactic is wearing thin so the latest round of fund-raising letters have a new enemy -- Muslims.

Similarly, Islamic extremists are losing the battle against modernity. Few Muslims want a Taliban-style regime or life. The signs from Afghanistan to Iran to Jordan are clear. So militants are searching for new divisive tactics. Some of them, from Saudi Wahhabi preachers to the al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist Zarqawi, have been highlighting another cause -- the need to keep the Shiites down. It's a prejudice that Sunni extremists have long held. But it is unlikely to work.

The persecution of Shiites has been the dirty little secret of the Islamic world. If you ask most Muslims, they will tell you that the Sunni and Shia live harmoniously. This is true in a day-to-day sense. You could live in a Muslim country and be unaware of who is a Sunni and who is a Shia. But this peace is partly the result of the comfortable dominance of the Sunnis, who make up over 85 percent of Muslims worldwide. In many Muslim countries there are almost no Shiites. And where they exist in small minorities, relations are fine -- as long as the Shia don't protest their secondary place. The Shia tend to be somewhat marginalised but often not in a systematic sense. (Saudi Arabia is, as always, the extreme, where Shiites who want to get ahead have been known to

become Sunnis. The repression in Saddam's Iraq was also atypical.) Sectarian violence is rare except that every year around the Ashura commemorations, there are attacks on Shia mourners in South Asia, which is one of the few places where the Shia are allowed to openly perform this ritual. In contrast, Sunnis face no such problems in Iran, the only Shiite-majority country that is also ruled by Shiites. (Iraq will be the next one.)

But by forcing this issue out in the open, Sunni extremists are unlikely to gain much support. It's one thing for Sunnis to want to maintain their dominance, another altogether to want to kill the Shia. Mainstream Sunnis are more likely to be shocked and embarrassed by the airing of this hatred. Like all bigotry, it's a difficult one to justify; shining light on it could prove to be an effective disinfectant. It will also remind people how extreme the Islamic radicals are. Highlighting anti-Catholic bigotry discredited the extreme forms of Protestant fundamentalism, so exposing the hatred behind al Qaeda's creed will further discredit it.

Most important, by waging war on fellow Muslims, Islamic radicals are proving that the war against terror is not a clash between civilizations, but a clash within a civilization. And the bad guys are losing.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.  
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# Campaign finance in US elections

ERSHAD KHANDKER

It is not altogether clear to most people how the politicians have so much money to conduct the massive campaigns during election time. Most of the time, money comes from donations. Private funds from individual, interest groups, large corporate entities that want to create influence in the government and political establishment. The expensive cars carrying the candidates, rallies, processions, free food for the thousands who participate remain a source of worry because the amount of money spent is more than necessary and the display is simply brazen. Elections in the U.S. are even more amazing, with election offices that resemble large corporate bodies, and campaigns that are every bit as organised as any large company and run by qualified professionals and experts who could find a place in the board of top ten companies. That is why campaign finance continues to be a very vexing question surrounding elections in the U.S.

The 1996 elections, in which President Clinton won a resounding victory, remain in memory as controversial for the dubious ways adopted by the Democratic Party to acquire campaign contribution. One can remember sleepovers in the Lincoln bedroom of the White House in exchange of contribution to the Clinton campaign etc. Other infractions include accepting money from foreign national,

using government property to raise campaign money, Using subterfuge to mask some contributions, policy decisions instituted to curry favour from political donors, and casually contravening rules governing campaign fund raising activities.

The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) 1971, laid emphasis on disclosure of accounts, source of campaign fund, ceiling on the media expenditure as well as usage of personal money for official campaign. The shady dealings of the Watergate scandal forced Congress to ratify the Act in 1974. The prerogative order on using money from public and union exchequers was kept in place. Candidates were proscribed from using too much personal fund. However, they were allowed to get federal funding matching their own fund as long as they agreed not to accept private campaign donations. However, this extraordinary zeal against profligate spending in elections could take place, the supreme court (Buckley vs. Valo) declared that corruption or the appearance of corruption could justify campaign fund being regulated but the government does not have the right to put a ceiling on individual expenditure.

All of the above had portents of a coming flood of activities by the political type "operators", who know that the need for money is there and the urge to win election would create a demand for new source of fund. The absence of any clear and compact campaign

finance law leads to a proliferation of "lobbyists" and middlemen types, elements who would arrange finance form corporate and other sources by promising support for issues advocated by the donors. No laws were broken but the appearance of advocacy based campaign donations brought more and more money in the election race. Congressional elections were the breeding ground of the political advocacy type groups known as PAC (Political Action Committees) the number of such entities is growing enormously.

The two party system, where the Republicans and the Democrats vie for political power, is perhaps a contributing factor in this proliferation of interest based lobbying and the donation of large funds to political coffers. The two parties find themselves in the awkward position of either dominating the Senate or holding the executive power. The result is inertia, as each wants the other to initiate meaningful campaign reform. The issue seems to have been consigned to the backburner in this election. The Americans may have to wait till the next election campaign or the next big scandal to see progress in campaign finance law. In a country where the law courts and the Federal Reserve Bank are independent, perhaps a new independent body with a high profile appointment as head of the commission would be a first beg step.

Ershad Khandker is a freelance journalist.



# Living a quality retired life

ZAHID HOSSAIN

As people in general are being more conscious and careful about their healthcare and food intake and thus to live longer, efforts are equally being made for a quality old and retired life. Generally most of the retired and old people are now normally found to be extra cautious about their way of life, intake of food and other day-to-day habits and life style.

Family members also nowadays take special care to keep the old members of the family free from tension, worry and anxiety. Since worrying about getting old may be taking years off one's life, those who can afford obviously try to chalk-out special round-the-clock schedule for keeping themselves engaged and occupied with tension-free jobs and other such occupations. Special care is for taking harmless or less harmful food items in order to keep them physically well and fit. Having tension free life and as far as possible remaining free from all sorts of materialistic botherations also get due consideration.

Nowadays psychologists of most of the western universities have been giving lot of their attention to find out the best possible ways and methods to keep the old and retired people well both physically and mentally. They are putting much of their efforts -- on quality and quantity of food intake as well as on physical fitness.

Psychologists from the Yale

University, U.S.A have found that people who have a positive outlook towards aging live an average of 7.5 years longer than those who regret the passage of time. They have suggested that negative feelings about growing old could sap a person's will to live. Another likely factor is the effect of stress on the heart, they opine.

Previous research has shown that the hearts and arteries of

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elderly people who are exposed to negative aging stereotypes do not respond well to stress. The effects of worrying about ageing appear to be greater than factors such as blood pressure, body weight, smoking and exercise, as has been suggested by Dr. Becca Levy, who headed a research team at the University of Chicago Medical School, U.S.A. "The effect of more positive self perceptions of aging on survival is greater than the physiological measures of low systolic blood pressure and cholesterol each of

which is associated with a longer life span of four years or less", she maintains.

Dr. Levy's team found that the will to live accounted partially for the link between positive self-perceptions of aging and survival but could not explain it entirely.

However, there are number of myths about retirement and aging that persist, despite the fact that

populations are becoming older and older. The first myth equates age with ill health. Yet research by the U.S.-based MacArthur Foundation found that 40 percent of over 65s reported that they were in excellent or very good health. In the 65 to 74 brackets, 89 percent reported no disability at all.

The second myth is that the elderly people stop learning altogether. It is not fine at all. Research repeatedly shows that the elderly people are among the most enthusiastic users of new technology. Grand parents nowadays realise that the best possible way to communicate with their dispersed grand children is through e-mail, or any such latest technological means.

As a matter of fact most of the western psychologists who have been regularly working on this area firmly believe that retirement can be the best time of people's lives. They are of the view that the secret is a thriving, happy retirement based first and foremost on doing what you enjoy. A happy retirement depends on creating an environment, which reinforces positive feelings. People need to focus on what they like or dislike doing, as what we like to do is often related to actions which result in positive experiences.

As a starting point to achieving this, as the study of the psychologists suggests, it is worth creating a pain/pleasure inventory. The retired people may prepare a list of things that irritate them and if possible, eradicate them from one's life. Another important step forward is to ensure old people's keeping in touch with the world. Absorbing information through television, newspaper, magazines or surfing the internet help one get more out of life, get a better return on one's actions as well as one's investments.

The study also added that keeping in touch with the world may involve adapting one's lifestyle as one grow older. Problems with memory often mean that thought processes need supplementing with physical reminders such as lists or

notes. Keeping as active and as fit as possible helps keep one's brain from becoming tired. Simplifying life style and remaining clutter can also help. Maintaining dialogue with others and talking about subject that interest you is another important element of keeping in touch with the world.

Taking on new challenges and learning new skills are ways of maintaining an interest in the world around. Creativity is not restricted by age. According to a study by American psychologists Smith Howard and Marika Stone, "A healthy mind is the engine for a healthy body. Your mind is healthy when it's about possibility rather than the past. A healthy mind is a mind that remains curious".

It is also a question of keeping oneself busy. A bustling diary-filled retirement is likely to be more fulfilling than one in which your calendar is blank. The challenge is to find activities that are productive and interesting, whether paid or unpaid, leisure or work. Nor does the human appetite for excitement necessarily come to an end when one retires. According to another psychologist a bit of excitement and uncertainty is good for a retired man. This will lead one to more action and activity, which will again keep the mind and body active and fit. But too much of it will be too much for the old people.

According to another British survey a new generation of British retirees are spurring the tradition of leaving money for their children to inherit and are instead splashing out on the high life. The survey said that nearly three quarters of retirees were happy to spend all their savings on having fun. Just 15 percent of men put anything away for their children at all.

As for the retired people of the developing countries like Bangladesh the position may not be the same as job opportunities in these countries are very limited. As the socio-economic condition of the developing countries is also not the same as it exist in the developed countries, the retired people of the developing countries have obviously to choose a different path for spending their retired life and proper utilisation of life-long savings and accumulated wealth.

In our context meeting relations and old friends and having reminiscences of memories of the past days is always a sweet exercise for the old and retired people who generally like to talk more. Those who have still some connection or attachment with the roots in the villages will definitely like to spend a few days occasionally there to have the taste of a different life totally free from normal worry or anxiety.

Zahid Hossain is a retired government official and now actively associated with Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, an organization of research and