

VIOLENCE IN THE NAME OF THE FAITH: A STUDY IN RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM FROM 1992 - 2002

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Abstract

Extremism in the name of religion has become the predominant pattern for violence in the 21st century. This is not to say that it began in the present century or the only model of violence in the modern world. Extremism in the name of religion is one of the pattern of violent behavior just as nationalism and ideology are also catalysts for extremist behavior. However, religious extremism has taken centre stage in the global community, relegating to the background secular and non-religious terrorism especially in the Post Cold War era. The old ideologies of class conflict, anti-colonial liberation and secular nationalism have been challenged by vigorous infusion of sectarian ideologies supported by grass root extremist groups. This paper interrogates the meaning, major attributes and the seemingly rationale for religious inspired extremism.

Introduction

Religious extremism is a violent behavior that is motivated by an absolute and fundamental belief that such extremist acts are sanctioned and commanded by their faith. It is an application of violence for the glory of the faith. In essence, religious extremism is an approved or legitimized violence so long as such violence is an expression of their religious belief. This paper is an interrogation of religious extremism to tease out the elements of this religious inspired violence. To achieve this aim, the paper is structured in five parts. Part one discusses the primary and secondary motives of religious terrorism while part two takes a look at cases of fighting, killing and dying in the name of the faith. Part three analyses state sponsored religious extremism and part four accounts for dissident religious extremism. Part five is the conclusion.

Primary and Secondary Motives of Religious Extremism

Religious extremism is motivated by issues and originates from countless religious, cultural and historical contexts. It is an expression of unquestioned faith in a supernatural being and purpose. It is therefore very much contingent on trends within specific religion, the historical experiences of ethno-national groups and the unique political environment of states¹.

As a basis for extremism, religious faith has been applied in different ways depending on the religious, cultural and political environment of each terrorist group. In some environments, religion is the primary motive for terrorist action. On other context, it is a secondary motive that is part of an overarching cultural identify for politically violent groups². As a primary motive, religion is at the core of an extremist group's political, social and evolutionary agenda. Within this context, the religious belief system is the driving force behind their behavior. Examples of these cases are found in the Middle East among the Islamic fundamentalists, in India among the Hindu extremists and in the United states among the violent Christian anti-abortionist. In the United States, a group called 'the Army of God' expressed support and advocated violent attacks against the abortion clinics and providers³

In one their manuals, The Army of God made this declaration

We the remnant of God'sfearing men and women of America do officially declare war on the entire child killing industry. After praying, fasting and making continual supplications to God for your pagan, hidden, infidel souls, we then passively presented our bodies in fronts of your death camps, begging you to stop the mass murder of infants. Yet you mocked God and continued the holocaust. All of the options have expired. Our most dread Sovereign Lord God requires that whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. We are forced to take up arms against you. You shall not be tortured at our hands. Vengeance belongs to God only. However, execution is rarely gentle⁴.

As a secondary motive, religion represents one aspect of extremist group's overall identify and agenda. For many ethno nationalist and other revolutionary groups, national independence or some other degree of autonomy form the primary motivation for their group behavior. Religious affiliation can be important because it is an element of their ethnic or national identity but their ultimate goal is grounded in their secular identity⁵. For instance, the catholic in Northern Ireland, and the Protestants in Southern Sudan are among the Christians and believers in traditional faith. In Palestine, the Jewish terrorist group, Lohmey Henth Israel (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel) commonly known as the STERN GANG, issued the following statement rationalizing the group's violence against the British occupation of Palestine before the creation of the state of Zion thus;

Now this is the Law of our war, so long as there is fear in the heart of any Jew in the world, so long as there are embers burning under our feet anywhere in the world, so long as there is a foreign policeman guarding the gates of our homeland, so long as there is a foreign master over our country, so long as we do not rule our own land, so long shall we be in your way. You will look around you and fear day and night⁶.

Jihad as a Primary Motive

In the modern world, the incidences of religious extremism are activities of radical Islamists. This is so because some people equates radical Islam with extremism due to their understanding or misunderstanding of the origin and growth of radical interpretation of Islam. One of such issue is the common belief that the concept of Holy War is an underlying principle in the Islamic faith. However, in relation to Muslim's support to Jihad, one can assert that most Muslims even the Islamic fundamentalist are not terrorists. The concept of Jihad is a tenet in Islam. Contrary to some misconception, Jihad in its meaning is "a sacred struggle rather than an armed conflict or fanatical Holy War"⁸. Although Jihad can certainly be manifested as a Holy War, it is the duty of Muslims to strive in the way of God. In the Quran, Jihad refers to the internal effort to reform bad habits in the Islamic community or within the individual Muslim. It also denotes war waged in the service of religion⁹. The greater Jihad refers to the struggle each person has within himself to do what is right because of human pride, selfishness and sinfulness, people of faith must constantly wrestle

with them and strive to do what is right and good. The lesser Jihad involves the outward defence of Islam, Muslims should be prepared to defend Islam, including military defence when the community of faith is under attack¹⁰. Thus, waging Islamic Jihad is not the same as waging Christian crusade. Nevertheless, it is permissible and even a duty to wage war to defend the fact against aggression. Under this case, warfare is conceptually defensive in nature¹⁰.

Secondary Religious Motives

Extremist religious and secular ideologies have historically scapegoated undesirable groups. Many conspiracy theories have emerged to denigrate these groups and to implicate them in nefarious plans to destroy an existing order. Some of these conspiracy theories possess quasi-religious element that in effect classify the scapegoated group as being in opposition to a natural and sacred order¹¹. Among right-winged nationalists and racists, there often exists a convergence between scapegoating and mysticism. Just as it is common for rightists to assert their natural and sacred superiority, it is also common for them to demonise a scapegoated group, essentially declaring that the entire group is inherently evil. One quasi religious conspiracy theory is the promulgation of a document titled "the Protocols of the Learners Elders of Zion"¹².

The Protocol originated in Czarist Russia and was allegedly the true proceedings of a meeting of a mysterious committee of the Jewish faith, during which a plot to rule the world was hatched in league with the Freemasons. The Protocol is a detailed record of this alleged conspiracy for world domination, but they were forgery written by the secret police of Czar Nicholas II in 1895 and published by Professor Sergyei Nilus¹³. Many antiSemitic groups have used this document to justify the repression of European Jews and it was an ideological foundation for the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in Europe, including the massacres in Eastern Europe. The National Socialist and Adolf Hitler used the Protocols extensively. Modern Eurocentric neo-Nazis and Middle Eastern extremists, both secular and religious continue to publish and circulate the Protocol as anti-Semitic propaganda. In this regard, new-Nazis and Middle Eastern extremists have found common cause in quasi-religious anti-Semitism. In 1995, a Russian court formally ruled that the Protocols are a forgery¹⁴.

Cases of violence in the name of the Faith

Extremism carried out in the name of the faith has long been a feature of human affairs. The history of people, civilizations, nations and empires are replete with examples of extremist activities, who engage in violence to promote their particular belief system. Some religious extremist are inspired by defensive motives, others seek to ensure the predominance of their faith and others are motivated by an aggressive amalgam of these tendencies¹⁵. However, faith based violence exhibits the same qualities of other terrorist environments. Religious extremism can be communal, genocidal, nihilistic or revolutionary. It can be committed by lone wolves, clandestine cells, large dissident movement or government. Depending on one's perspective, there is often debate about whether the perpetrators should be classified as terrorists or religious freedom fighters¹⁶.

Modern Arab Islamist Extremism

The Arab world traverse important historical phases under the Rulership of Ottoman Empire ended in 1918 after the First World War. This was followed by European domination which ended in the Second World War. New Arab and North African states who were ruled by

Monarch witnessed series of military coups and political upheavals that led to modern era of governance. These developments had serious impact on activism among Arab nationalist and intellectuals, culminating in the late 1940s in the creation of the State of Israel. Post war activism in the Arab Muslim world progressed through several phases, most of them secular expression of nationalism and socialism. The secular phases included the anti-colonial nationalism, during which Arab nationalism resisted the presence of European Administrators and armed forces, Pan Arab Nationalism (Nasserism) led by Egyptian Gamel Abdel Nasser which advocated the creation of a single dynamic United Arab Republic and secular leftist radicalism which was adopted by many activists to promote Marxists or other socialist principles of governance, sometimes in opposition to their own government¹⁷.

Many activists and intellectuals became disenchanted with these movements when they failed to deliver political reforms, economic prosperity and the desired degree of respect from the international community. Several humiliating military defeats at the hands of the Israelis and the intractable plights of the Palestinians diminished the esteem and deference enjoyed by the secular movement. Arab nationalists, both secular and sectarian had struggled since the end of world war II to resist what they saw as Western domination and exploitation, and some traditional oriented nationalists began to interpret Western culture and values to be alien to Muslim morality and values¹⁸.

Consequently, new movement promoting Islamic extremism began to overshadow the ideologies of the previous generation. This has placed many Islamists at odds with existing Arabs government many of which are administered under the ethics of old ideologies. In the post Cold War Era, the adoption of Islam as a means of liberation has taken a logical progression when radical secular ideologies and movements achieved minimal progress in resisting the West and Israel and when secular Arab government repressed any expression of domestic dissent, many activists and intellectuals turned to radical interpretations of Islam,. This should not be surprising because:

The discrediting of leftist ideologies within the Muslim world, like the earlier loss of respect for Nasserite pan Arabism has meant that political Islam has become the main vehicle there for expression of strongly held dissent. A young man in a Muslim state who want to make a forceful and discrediting statement against the existing order has few avenues for doing so except through membership in a radical Islamic group¹⁹.

State Sponsored Religious Extremism

This is the most organized and potentially the most far-reaching application of extremist violence. Government posses an array of resources that are unavailable to non state groups which means that the state is unmatched in its ability to commit acts of violence. Government sponsorship of extremism is not limited to providing support for ideological or ethno national movements. It also incorporate state sponsorship of religious revolutionary movement²⁰. In discussing state religious extremism, the paper will take cases of few states to present these narratives. Iran, India and Pakistan will remain the area of focus.

Iran

Iran is known for state sponsored terrorism after the overthrow of the monarchy of Shah

Mohammed Reza in 1979 and the creation of the theocratic Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran has been implicated in the sponsorship of a number of groups that are known to have engaged in terrorist violence, making it a perennial entry on the U.S. Department of State's list state sponsors of terrorism. The Iranian 125,000 member Revolutionary Guard Corps has a unit – the Qods (Jerusalem Force) that promotes Islamic revolution abroad and the liberation of Jerusalem from non Muslims.

Members of the revolutionary guard have appeared in Lebanon and Sudan, and the United States designated the entire corps a terrorist group in August, 2007. Significantly, Iranian officials have repeatedly announced the formation of Iranian 'martyrdom' units who are prepared to engage in suicide attacks against American and Israelis targets²¹.

Iranian Support for Lebanon Hezbollah

An important example of Iranian support for a terrorist group is the patronage and assistance given to Lebanon's Hezbollah movement. The Iranian Hezbollah relationship is important in view of the crucial role played by Hezbollah in the region's political environment. Lebanon Shi'a which is half of Lebanon's Muslims are historically poor but a politically influential population among Lebanon's religious groups. Hezbollah (the Party of God), is a Shi'a movement in Lebanon that emerged to champion the country's Shi'a population and their religious belief during the Lebanese Civil War and Israeli's invasion of 1982. The main objective of the movement was to fight for Lebanese independence and justice. Hezbollah was responsible for hundreds incidents of political violence during the 1980s and 1990s. These incidents included among others the kidnapping of Westerners in Beirut, suicide bombing and other attacks against Israel in South Lebanon and the State of Zion. They operated under various names such as Islamic Jihad and Revolutionary Justice Organization. Hezbollah is noted for proxies for state sponsored terrorism, practitioners of religious dissident terrorism, participation in international terrorism and application of asymmetrical methods such as high profile kidnapping and suicide bombings. Also Hezbollah is an effective guerrilla terrorist force and a diversified social activist organization. **Iranian Support for Palestinian Islamists**

Iran has also assisted and promoted religious movements that are confronting the State of Israel in Gaza, the West Bank and inside Israeli's border. Since the days of Iranian revolution, the Iranian regime has been very vocal about its goal to 'liberate Jerusalem'. To achieve this aim, Iran has given overt support for Palestinian organizations that rejects dialogue and negotiations with the Israelis. It has provided enormous assistance to the Palestinian cause by promoting the emergence and sustenance of Islamic organizations such as the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Hamas Islamic Resistance Movement (IRM), and other Islamic extremist groups. These groups are revolutionary movements that advocates violent jihad to form an Islamic State of Palestine. These groups have received assistance in the form of military instruction and logistical support from the Islamic State of Iran. For instance, the origin of Hamas is rooted in the Palestinian branch of the Islamic Brotherhood. It operates both as a social service organization and armed resistance group that promotes Jihad.

Due to social service component, Iran funds for martyrs disbursed millions of dollars to Hamas. Hamas posted a representative to Iran who held several meetings with Iranian government officials. Iran also provided Hamas with military instruction, logistical support and training at Hezbollah Bekah Valley Camps²².

Pakistan and India

India and Pakistan are implacable rivals. Much of the causes for this rivalry is rooted in religious differences between the Hindu and Muslim communities and the sponsorship of terrorists activities has made the region a flash point of violence. Hindus and Muslims in South West Asia had engaged in religious violence since 1947 when the Britain colonial rule ended. The spiritual and political structure against the British rule was the popular Indian Leader Mahatma Gandhi, who formed and led a revolutionary movement based on non-violence and principles of inclusive community. However, Gandhi spiritual convictions could not forestall sectarian conflicts in India. After the British withdrawal, communal conflict and terrorist activities between Hindus and Muslim led to the partition of British India into East Pakistan, West Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Hindu India. During the partition, Hindus and Muslims migrated across the new borders by hundreds of thousands. Since independence, conflict has been perpetrated between Pakistan and India over many issues including Indian support for Bangladesh War of Independence from Pakistan borders dispute, support for religious nationalist terrorist organizations, the development of nuclear weapons and the disputed Jammu and Kashmir regions²³.

Pakistan, courtesy of its intelligence network has a long history of supporting insurgent groups in the Indian State of Punjab and in Jammu and Kashmir have received Pakistani aid in what has become a high stakes conflict between two new nuclear powers. The Pakistan – India conflict is as volatile as the Israel-Arab conflicts. In the Jammu and Kashmir regions occupied by Pakistan, India and China, a sustained insurgency support by the Islamic State of Iran (ISI) led to human rights violations and campaign of terrorism. The fighting was between the Pakistani proxies and Muslim Kashmir on one side and the Indian army on the other side. These regions accommodates about seventy percent of Jammu and Kashmir population who are dominantly muslims, the remaining 30% are the Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists²⁴.

Islamic fighters from nay Islamic groups supported by Pakistan have waged a long sustained war against the Indian presence, using terrorist methods to attack Indian forces and interests. Their ultimate aim is independence for Jammu and Kashmir. Pro-Pakistan Muslim fighters included the Mujahdeen from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Arab states involved in the insurgency and terrorist campaign included Lashkare Taiba, a large Pakistani proxy based in Pakistan, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, a long standing independence movement, Harkat-Ansar which kidnapped six Western hostages in 1995 and Jammu and Kashmir Islamic front, another Pakistani proxy supported by the ISIS.

One of the most terrible terrorist acts in this region was the Golden Temple Massacre of June, 1984. Sikhism is a religion that was founded about 506 ago. One of its major beliefs is that only a single, all powerful God should be worshiped, although its followers accept and recognize the existence of lesser gods. This religion is centered on the Indian state of Punjab with about 20 million followers and has a sacred temple called the 'The Golden Temple' located in the city of Amritsar, Punjab²⁵.

Punjab is known for discordant violence resulting from the Sikh nationalism, the policies of the Indian army, Punjabi interests and Pakistani agitation. With support from Pakistani, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Sikh nationalists agitated since 1970 for the creation of the Sikh state of Khalistan in Punjab. In May 1984, armed Sikh militants occupied the Golden Temple.

After negotiations failed the Indian Government of Indira Gandhi approved an assault against the Sikh militants. When Indian troops stormed the temple in June 1984, they were met by greater fire power than they anticipated. Tanks and artillery were called in and hundreds were killed before the temple was retaken²⁶.

The assault on the Golden Temple inflamed tension in Punjab, leading to communal violence and terrorist acts between Sikh and Punjabis. Nationalists declared independence for Khalistan in 1987 but 500,000 Indian troops violently occupied the Punjab, killing about 250,000 Sikhs between 1984 and 1992. Also, the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi was assassinated in October 1984 by Sikh body guards in revenge for the Golden Temple attack. The above analysis is few cases of state sponsored religious terrorism. The remaining part of the paper focuses on the dissident religious terrorism with examples in the Middle East, Africa and Asia²⁷.

Dissident Religious Extremism

By dissident religious extremism, the paper refers to political violence conducted by groups of religious fanatics (true believers), who have faith in the righteousness of their cause. Most religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism possess extremist adherents some have engaged in violence activities. Among the principles found among the religious extremists is their conviction that they are defending their faith from attacks by non-believers or that their faith is an indisputable and universal guiding principle that must be advanced for the salvation of the faithful. These principles are manifested in various ways and to varying degrees by religious extremists but they are always at the extreme of their faith. This paper considers some cases to demonstrate the extremism of these terrorist activities²⁸.

Religious Zealotry in the Middle East

From the perspective of religious fanaticism in the Middle East, violence done in the name of God is regarded as a perfectly rational behaviour because God is on their side. Many of the Holy sites in the region are sacred to more than one faith, as in the case of Jerusalem, where a convergence of claims exists among Muslims, Christians and Jews. When the convergence occurs, some extremists believe that the claims of other faith are inherently blasphemous. Because of this "indisputable truth", some extremists believe that God wishes non-believers to be driven from sacred sites or otherwise barred from legitimizing their claims. As argued by Ahmed Yassin, the founder of the Palestinian Islamic Group – Hamas in justifying the 1988 religious violence, "first of all, these are not suicide operations. Islam forbids suicide. We are protecting ourselves. The Jews attack and kill our civilians too. From the first drop of

blood, he goes to paradise. The Jewish victims immediately go to hell"²⁹.

The Grand Mosque Saga

The Islamic religion is structured on Five Pillars (faith, prayer, zakat (alms or charity), fasting during the month of Ramadan and the Hajji or pilgrimage) to the holy city of Mecca for those who can afford it. In November, 1979 during the Hajji, about 300 Muslim extremists occupied the grand Mosque in Mecca. The aim was to foment an Islamic uprising against the Government of Saudi-Arabia. After two weeks of fighting, the Grand Mosque was taken over by Saudi forces but not before the Saudi authorities called in the French counter terrorist commandos to flush out the extremists. More than 100 of these

Islamic extremists were killed and some were later executed by the Saudi Government³⁰. **The**

Hebron Mosque Massacre

On February 25, 1994, a physician, Baruch Goldstein, fired on worshippers inside the Ibrahim Mosque at the care of the Patriarch holy site in the city of Hebron, Israel. As worshippers performed their Morning Prayer rituals, Goldstein fired about 108 rounds of bullets within 10 minutes before the crowd of worshippers rushed him and killed him. According to government source, Goldstein killed about 29 people and wounded 125, but unofficial sources claimed that 50 people were killed. In reprisal for the Hebron massacre, the Palestinian Islamic movement – HAMAS launched a bombing campaign that included the first ware of human suicide bombers³¹.

The Rabin Assassination

On November 4, 1995, Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhalk Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir. He shot Rabin in the back in full view of Israeli security operatives. Amir was a Jewish extremist who said that he acted within the requirements of Halacha or the Jewish code. The following analysis describes the religious justification of Amir's action:

Asked where he got his idea, Yigal Amir told the magistrate that he drew on the Halacha, which is the Jewish legal code. According to the Halacha, you can kill the enemy. Amir said “my whole life, I learned Halacha, when you killed in war, it is an act that is allowed. When asked whether he acted alone, Amir replied, it was God”

The International Mujahedeen (Holy Warrior for the Faith)

The Mujahedeen are Islamic fighters who have sworn a vow to take up arms to defend the Islamic faith. They are Islamic fundamentalists who have defined their Jihad or personal struggle to be one of fighting and dying on behalf of the faith. The modern conceptualization of Mujahedeen began during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan between December, 1979 and February 1989. Although many afghan rebel groups fought the Soviets, they collectively referred to themselves as Mujahedeen. To them, their war of resistance was a Jihad. Also, Muslim volunteers from around the world served alongside the Afghan Mujahedeen. These 'Afghan Arabs' played a key role in spreading the modern Jihad ideology throughout the world. Reasons for belonging to this movement vary, depending on one's personal or national context, some recruits answer calls for Holy War from religious scholars who might declare that Islam is being repressed by the west. Others respond to contain identifiable threats to their people or country such as the soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United State (US) led occupation of Iraq or the Israeli occupation of Gaza or the West Bank. Others joined the Mujahedeen on behalf of the cause of other Muslims such as was the fought by Bosnian Muslims or Algerian rebels³².

The ideology of Mujahedeen requires selfless sacrifice in defence of the faith. Accepting the name mujahedeen mean that one must live, fight and die in accordance with its religious teachings. They believe in the inevitability of victory because the cause is being waged on behalf of the faith and in the name of God; both the faith and God will prevail. During these defence of the faith, trials and ordeals should be endured without compliant because the pain suffered in this world will be rewarded after death in paradise. The essence of Mujahedeen ideology is:

a hybrid and simplistic blend of Islamic fundamentalism. This Islam seeks to eradicate all forms of Islam other than its own literal interpretation of the Quran. It comes packaged with a set of now well-known political grievances and justifies violence as a means of purging nations of corruption, moral degradation

and spiritual torpor³³.

As applied by the Mujahedeen, the defensive ideology of jihad holds that when one defends the faith against the unfaithful, death is martyrdom and through death paradise will be achieved. One oath of commitment made by a recruit to the anti-soviet jihad in Afghanistan reads:

“I state in the presence of God that I will slaughter infidels in my entire life ... And supervision and guidance with Harkat ul-Ansar ... may God gave me strength in fulfilling this oath”³⁴.

Al-Qaeda Religious Movement

One of the most prominent Islamic revolutionary network of the modern age is the Al-Qaeda Terrorist Organization led by its former Leader Osama Bin Laden. This Organization which seeks to unite Muslims throughout the world in a Holy War, is not a traditional hierarchical revolutionary organization but a loose network of like-minded Islamic revolutionaries. Compared to other Islamic terrorist organizations, Al-Qaeda holds no territory and does not champion the aspiration of an ethnic national group; it has no top-down organizational structure, has virtually non-existent or well known state sponsorship and is completely religious in its world view³⁵.

The Algerian Jihadists

The first multiparty elections in Algeria were scheduled for 1992. When it became very clear that the Islamic salvation front would win the election, the election was cancelled by the government of President Chadi Ben Djedid, the Islamic, the Islamic salvation front incited violent demonstrations and strikes and the government responded by declaring state of emergency, postponing the general elections and seizing the offices of the Islamic salvation front. This led to an anti-government campaign of terrorism which led to large-scale insurgency that committed acts of terrorism, such as indiscriminate bombing in strategic positions like airport and other places. These bombings claimed many lives and left thousands of Algerians in the countryside. Such groups include the Armed Islamic group, Armed Islamic Movement. Thousands of secular teachers, journalists, doctors, academics were killed and foreigners were singled out for assassinations including French Christians, priests, nuns and monks³⁶.

In the countryside, bands of Islamic militants swept through villages and towns, killing, kidnapping and raping non-combatants of all ages. The government responded with a brutal suppression campaign that included massacres and the use of death squads. The government also armed local civilians included massacres and the use of death squads. The government also armed local civilian paramilitary units, many of which included veterans of the anti-colonial war against France. Between 1992 and 1979, approximately 120,000 people were killed³⁷.

Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth)

Aum Shinrikyo, a Japan-based cult founded in 1984 by Shoko Asahara. Their goal under Asahara's leadership was to seize control of Japan and then the world. The core belief of the cult is that Armageddon – the final battle before the end of the world is imminent. One component of this belief is that the United States will wage the third world war against Japan. As one member of the cult explained “this evil of the modern age will be shed in a catastrophic discharge and only those who repent their evil deeds will survive”³⁸.

Aum Shinrikyo's membership is estimated to be 9,000 members in Japan and 40,000 members around the world, Asahara claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ and Buddha and

urged his followers to arm themselves if they were to survive the Armageddon. This apocalyptic creed led to the stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons, including nerve gas, anthrax and Qfever. One source claimed that Aum Shinrikyo members had travelled to Africa to acquire the deadly Ebola virus. Various mysterious biochemical incidents occurred in Japan, including the one in June 1999 in the city of Matsumoto where 7 people died and 264 wounded from the release of gas into an apartment³⁹.

Another case took place on March 20, 1995. In the early hours of March 20, 1995, members of Aum Shinrikyo positioned many packages containing sarin nerve gas on five trains in the Tokyo subway system. The trains were scheduled to travel through Tokyo's Kasunmigaseki train station. The containers were simultaneously punctured with umbrella thus releasing the gas into the subway system. 12,000 were killed and about

6,000 people were injured. Tokyo's emergency medical system was unable to respond adequately to the attack, so that only about 500 victims were evacuated. It took the Japanese police several weeks to link the attack to the Aum sect, locate its leaders and seize some of the arsenal despite the fact that Aum was not a secret organization but one that paraded through the street of Tokyo in mask that depicted the face of their leader Shoko Asahara⁵¹. The police seized tons of chemicals stockpiled by the cult. Asahara was arrested and charged with murder, attempted murder, kidnapping and drug trafficking. A new leader, Fumihiko Joyu, assumed control of Aum Shinrikyo in 2000. He publicly denounced violence and the cult membership enjoyed tremendous increase in membership. A Japanese court sentenced the cult former leader Shoko Asahara to death by hanging on February 27, 2004.

Conclusion

Religious extremism is a major attribute of modern terrorism, and a binding ideology for many extremists. In essence, it has become a global phenomenon affecting almost every member of the international community. The current ideological profit of this development is one of activism and momentum among radical Islamists. Although extremist members of other faith had struck periodically, the Islamist tendency continues to attract new forms or cadres of Jihad who oppose secular government and Western values globally. As earlier argued, religion is a central feature of modern terrorism which is characterized by asymmetrical tactics, cell based network, indiscriminate attacks against soft target and the threatened use of high yield weapons technologies. Al-Qaeda, an example of terrorist organization served as a model for similarly motivated individuals and groups. Religious extremism used many techniques and tools of trade to perpetuate the violent acts. These organizations are motivated by faith and their goals are to construct a new society based on their religious or ethno national identity. State sponsored extremism emanates from government that pursues international agenda by encouraging religious proxies like Iran and Syria. Dissident religious extremism involves attacks by self proclaimed "true believers" against members of other faiths and perceived apostasies within their own faith.

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