Terrorism, millenarianism, and death: A study of Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo

Steven Nicholls, Edith Cowan University

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First Advisor
Peter Van Onselen

Second Advisor
Peter Bedford

Abstract
The relationship between death and the millennium is not an area of scholarship that has received adequate attention. Millenarian groups desire the creation of a paradise in the temporal world. The world is seen as corrupt and evil without hope of reform. This viewpoint leads millenarians to conclude that the temporal world must be completely destroyed and created a new, eliminating the corrupt and providing a utopia where the faithful can exist in peace. Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo are two terrorist groups which share this worldview, and believe that they can hasten the millennium by eliminating their enemies. This thesis explores the ways in which Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo understand death, not only as it relates to their enemies, but also as it relates to group members. Hezbollah uses suicide bombings as a tool for eliminating enemies and furthering their millenarian goals. Yet if suicide bombers no longer exist in the temporal world, they are unable to experience the millennium they are fighting for once it has been achieved. Similarly, when members of Aum Shinrikyo began to die unexpectedly, or were intentionally killed by other group members, Asahara (the group’s leader) needed to explain such deaths within the context of Aum’s millenarian worldview. In addition to locating the problem of ‘death’ within existing millenarian research, this thesis also questions the very nature of millenarian aspirations within Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo. In the case of Hezbollah, it is argued that establishing the millennium is not the ultimate goal of the group’s terrorist activities. Whilst it claims to be fighting on behalf of the Shiite population in Lebanon, it is actually exploiting them to secure a somewhat different objective aimed at the personal salvation of Hezbollah’s members in the afterlife. Although the study of ‘death’ does not contradict Aum’s millenarian nature in the same manner as Hezbollah, it is clear that ‘death’ contributes to our understanding of millenarian groups in a way which should not be ignored to the extent that it has been in the existing literature. Millenarian research performs an important role when studying terrorism, illuminating the beliefs and motivations of such groups. Ignoring the element of ‘death’ when researching the millenarian nature of terrorist groups can, in some cases, lead to a misrepresentation of the groups’ true character.

Recommended Citation
Aum Shinrikyo was an apocalyptic Japanese cult founded in 1984 as a yoga club by Shoko Asahara, who proclaimed himself as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ and Shiva. The sect's teachings include aspects from those of Christianity and Buddhism. The group is known as a dangerous cult and a terrorist group; it and its members have committed or have been accused of being involved in numerous illegal acts, including kidnappings, assassinations, murder, using chemical weapons for mass murder, and The Starting Point for Terrorism. Most experts in the study of terrorism point to the French Revolution as the starting point for modern terrorism. Not surprisingly, there was a period during the French Revolution known as the Reign of Terror. During the Reign of Terror, tens of thousands were executed for their perceived resistance to the revolution. X. The Soviet-Afghan War occurred during this wave, as well as the emergence of groups such as Hezbollah and Aum Shinrikyo—a Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian-influenced organization that attacked a Tokyo subway with nerve agents.

Rapoport points out that the majority of attacks have been committed by Islamic-based organizations, but there have been non-Islamic terrorist groups during this wave, as already mentioned with Aum Shinrikyo. Aum Shinrikyo has elements of Buddhism and Christianity although Christians and Buddhists have no association to the group. The founder, Shoko Asahara, was born in 1957 and is partially blind. He spent his life studying acupuncture which is a common career in Japan for the blind. ...The Attack by Aum Shinrikyo Britt W. Gerdes Grand Canyon University Terrorism and Emergency Management EMM 442 Prof. Jim Gallagher August 30, 2010 The Attack by Aum Shinrikyo It was March 20, 1995 and the time was 0800 hours, when the City of Tokyo was subjected to a terrorist act by a radical religious group. This group was Aum Shinrikyo, when translated mean “supreme truth”.