

**"HOLY TERROR": THE IMPLICATIONS OF TERRORISM MOTIVATED BY A  
RELIGIOUS IMPERATIVE**

**Bruce Hoffman**

RAND is a nonprofit institution that seeks to improve public policy through research and analysis. Papers are issued by RAND as a service to its professional staff. Their purpose is to facilitate the exchange of ideas among those who share the author's research interests; Papers are not reports prepared in fulfillment of RAND's contracts or grants. Papers are unedited. Views expressed in a Paper are the author's own and are not necessarily shared by RAND or its research sponsors. To order a RAND publication or to obtain more information about other RAND publications, please contact Distribution Services, RAND, 1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138, 310-393-0411, extension 6686.

Published 1993 by RAND  
1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

## “HOLY TERROR”<sup>1</sup> : THE IMPLICATIONS OF TERRORISM MOTIVATED BY A RELIGIOUS IMPERATIVE

DR. BRUCE HOFFMAN, RAND

Religion and terrorism share a long history. Indeed, many of the words we use in the English language to describe terrorists and their acts are derived from the names of religious groups active several centuries ago. The etymology of “zealot,”<sup>2</sup> for example, can be traced back to a millenarian Jewish sect who fought against the Roman occupation of what is now Israel between 66-73 A.D.<sup>3</sup> The Zealots waged a ruthless campaign of both individual assassination and wholesale slaughter, employing a primitive form of chemical warfare: poisoning wells and granaries used by the Romans and even sabotaging Jerusalem’s water supply.<sup>4</sup> The word “assassin”<sup>5</sup> is similarly derived from a religious terrorist group, in this case a radical offshoot of the Muslim Shi’a who, between 1090-1272 A.D., fought the Christian Crusaders attempting to conquer present-day Syria and Iran.<sup>6</sup> Literally “hashish-eater,” the assassin would ritualistically imbibe hashish before committing murder: an act regarded as a sacramental or divine duty designed to hasten the new millennium. An additional—perhaps even more compelling—motivation was the promise that, should the assassin perish in the course of his act, he would immediately ascend to a glorious heaven: thus fostering an ethos of self-sacrifice and suicidal martyrdom<sup>7</sup> that is apparent in some Muslim terrorist movements today. Finally, the appellation “thug”<sup>8</sup> comes from an Indian religious association of professional robbers and murders who, from the seventh century until their suppression in the mid-19th century, systematically strangled wayward travelers as sacrificial offerings to Kali, the Hindu goddess of terror and destruction. Estimates put the number of persons murdered by the Thugs during their six hundred year

---

<sup>1</sup>Paper presented at the “Worldwide Department of Defense Combating Terrorism Conference,” Virginia Beach, VA, 8-11 June 1993.

<sup>2</sup>“One who pursues his object with passionate ardour. . .an immoderate partisan, a fanatical enthusiast.” *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 3868.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977), pp. 7-8; and, David C. Rapoport, “Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3, September 1984, pp. 668-672.

<sup>4</sup>Laqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>“One who undertakes to put another to death by treacherous violence.” *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, p. 125

<sup>6</sup>The most detailed and comprehensive study of the group can be found in Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985).

<sup>7</sup>See *Ibid.*, passim; Laqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 8-9; and, Rapoport, “Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions,” pp. 664-668.

<sup>8</sup>“A vicious or brutal ruffian.” *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, p. 3311.

existence as between 500,000 and a million: an astonishing death toll considering , on the one hand, that each victim was individually strangled and, on the other, that the Thugs' modern-day terrorist counterparts have rarely been able to achieve anywhere close to the annual average of Thug murders despite more efficacious and increasingly lethal weaponry.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, as David C. Rapoport points out in his seminal study of "holy terror," until the nineteenth century and the advent of nationalism, anarchism, and Marxist ideology, "religion provided the only acceptable justifications for terror."<sup>10</sup> Thus, while the relationship between terrorism and religion is not new, in recent decades this form of terrorism has largely been overshadowed by ethnic- and nationalist-separatist or ideologically motivated terrorism.<sup>11</sup> For example, none of the 13 identifiable terrorist groups active in 1968 (the year credited with having marked the advent of modern, international terrorism) could be classified as "religious." Today, at least twenty percent of the approximately 50 known terrorist groups active throughout the world can be described as having a dominant religious component or motivation. Admittedly, many contemporary terrorist groups—such as the Provisional Irish Republic Army, their Protestant counterparts in Northern Ireland, the Palestine Liberation Organization, various Armenian terrorist movements, and both the Tamil Tigers and J.V.P. in Sri Lanka—have a strong religious element. But the political aspect is the dominant characteristic of these groups, as evidenced by the preeminence of their nationalist or irredentist aims.

What is particularly striking about "holy terror" compared to purely "secular terror," however, is the radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justification, concepts of morality, and Manichean world view that the "holy terrorist" embraces. For the religious terrorist, violence first and foremost is a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative. Terrorism assumes a transcendental dimension,<sup>12</sup> and its perpetrators are thereby unconstrained by the political, moral, or practical constraints that seem to affect other terrorists. Whereas secular terrorists generally consider indiscriminate violence immoral and counterproductive,<sup>13</sup> religious terrorists regard such violence not only as morally justified, but as a necessary expedient for the attainment of their goals. Thus,

---

<sup>9</sup>Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," pp. 660-664. If one accepts that upwards of a million persons may have been murdered by the Thugs, on average then, they killed 1,666 persons a year.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 659.

<sup>11</sup>Admittedly many "secular" terrorist groups have a strong religious element as well: the PIRA, the Armenians, and perhaps the PLO as well. However, the political aspect is the predominant characteristic of these groups, as evinced by their nationalist or irredentist aims.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," p. 674.

<sup>13</sup>Brian M. Jenkins, *The Likelihood Of Nuclear Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, July 1985, P-7119), pp. 4-5.

religion serves as a legitimizing force—conveyed by sacred text or imparted via clerical authorities claiming to speak for the divine.

Religious and secular terrorists also differ in their constituencies. Whereas secular terrorists attempt to appeal to a constituency variously composed of actual and potential sympathizers, members of the communities they purport to “defend,” or the aggrieved people they claim to speak for; religious terrorists are at once activists and constituents engaged in what they regard as a “total war.” They execute their terrorist acts for no audience but themselves. Thus the restraints on violence that are imposed on secular terrorists by the desire to appeal to a tacitly supportive or uncommitted constituency are not relevant to the religious terrorist. Moreover, this absence of a constituency in the secular terrorist sense leads to a sanctioning of almost limitless violence against a virtually open-ended category of targets—that is, anyone who is not a member of the terrorists’ religion or religious sect. This explains the rhetoric common to “holy terror” manifestos describing persons outside the terrorists’ religious community in denigrating and dehumanizing terms such as, “infidels,” “non-believers,” “children of Satan,” and “mud people.” The deliberate use of such adjectives to condone and justify terrorism is significant, in that it further erodes the constraints on violence and bloodshed by portraying the terrorists’ victims as either “sub-human” or “unworthy” of living.

In addition, where the aims of the “secular political” terrorists can be described as utilitarian—seeking to bring about changes to achieve the greatest benefits for the greatest number—the aims of “religious political” terrorists are more accurately defined as the attainment of the greatest possible benefits for themselves and their co-religionists only. This further engenders a tremendous disparity between ends and means. Where the secular terrorist sees violence primarily as a means to an end, the religious terrorist tends to view violence as an end in itself.

Finally, religious and secular terrorists have starkly different perceptions of themselves and their violent acts. Where secular terrorists regard violence as a way of instigating the correction of a flaw in a system that is basically good or as a means to foment the creation of a new system, religious terrorists see themselves not as components of a system worth preserving, but as “outsiders,” and therefore seek vast changes in the existing order.<sup>14</sup> This sense of alienation also enables the religious terrorist to contemplate far more destructive and deadly types of terrorist operations than secular terrorists and indeed to embrace a far more open-ended category of “enemies” for attack. Taheri, for example, ascribes three key differences in this respect between Islamic terrorism and secular forms of terrorism:

---

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror: The Inside Story of Islamic Terrorism* (London: Sphere Books, Ltd., 1987), pp. 7–8.

First, it rejects all the contemporary ideologies in their various forms; it sees itself as the total outsider with no option but to take control or to fall, gun in hand...

The second characteristic that distinguishes the Islamic version from other forms of terrorism is that it is clearly conceived and conducted as a form of Holy War which can only end when total victory has been achieved...

The third specific characteristic of Islamic terrorism is that it forms the basis of a whole theory both of individual conduct and of state policy. To kill the enemies of Allah and to offer the infidels the choice between converting to Islam or being put to death is the duty of every individual believer, as well as the supreme--if not the sole--task of the Islamic state.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, at the root of the decade-long Islamic terrorist campaign backed by Iran has been the desire to extend throughout the world the fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law in Iran and, indeed, to export the revolution that established the Iranian Islamic Republic to other Muslim countries. As the late Ayatollah Khomeini declared,

We must strive to export our Revolution throughout the world, and must abandon all idea of not doing so, for not only does Islam refuse to recognize any difference between Muslim countries, it is the champion of all oppressed people. . . . We must make plain our stance toward the powers and superpowers and demonstrate to them despite the arduous problems that burden us. Our attitude to the world is dictated by our beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

The revolution in Iran, accordingly, is held up as an example to Muslims throughout the world to reassert the fundamental teachings of the Koran and to resist the intrusion of Western--particularly United States--influence over the Middle East. This is also a reflection of the beliefs and history of Shi'a Islam as interpreted by Khomeini and subscribed to by his followers in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. Three desiderata form the basis of this ideology:

First, Shiites do not believe in the legitimate authority of secular governments. The 12th and last of the Shiite Imams, or successors to the Prophet Mohammed, is expected to reappear eventually to institute the rule of God's law on earth. Until then, all states are, on some level, inalienably illegitimate. Since Iran is the only state to have begun to implement 'true' Islam, however, it is thought to be the world's only legitimate state with a unique obligation of facilitating the worldwide implementation of Islamic law. Force and violence are not only acceptable but necessary means of doing so...

Second, the Shiites see themselves as a persecuted minority. They believe that through their special knowledge of the Koran . . . passed on to them by the Prophet Mohammed and the 12 Imams, they are the righteous few dominated by an innately wrongful majority...

Third, the Shiites view themselves as victims of injustice and oppression. Ayatollah Khomeini has interpreted this theme to make the Shiites the representatives, even

---

<sup>15</sup>ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution* (Trans. by Hamid Algar) (London: KPI, Ltd., 1981), pp. 286-287.

vanguard, of the “oppressed and innocent masses crushed under foot all over the world.”<sup>17</sup>

This sense of alienation and of the necessity for far-reaching changes in the world order is apparent in the works of a number of Shi’a theologians. “The world as it is today is how others shaped it,” wrote Ayatollah Baqer al-Sadr. “We have two choices: either to accept it with submission, which means letting Islam die, or to destroy it, so that we can construct the world as Islam requires.” Mustafa Chamran has stated, “We are not fighting within the rules of the world as it exists today. We reject all those rules,” Or, as Hussein Mussawi, the former leader of Lebanon’s *Hezbollah*, who was assassinated last year in an Israeli helicopter assault once remarked: “We are not fighting so that the enemy recognizes us and offers us something. We are fighting to wipe out the enemy”<sup>18</sup>

Nor are such sentiments restricted to radical Shi’a only. Militant Sunni fundamentalist organizations portray their struggle in similarly uncompromising terms. The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, better known by its Arabic acronym, *Hamas*, for example, bluntly states that, “Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it.” More pointed is the call to arms issued by one of the movement’s senior clerics, Imam Sheikh Ahmad Ibrahim, who reportedly declared that, “Six million descendants of monkeys [i.e., Jews] now rule in all the nations of the world, but their day, too, will come. Allah! Kill them all, do not leave even one.”<sup>19</sup>

The record of terrorist acts by Shi’a Islamic groups reinforces the causal link between terrorism motivated by a religious imperative and the high levels of lethality compared to secular terrorist organizations. Although these groups have committed only eight percent of all international terrorist incidents since 1982, they are nonetheless responsible for 30 percent of the total number of persons killed in terrorist acts throughout the world.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, contrary to its depiction and discussion in Western news accounts, terrorism motivated by religion is by no means a phenomenon restricted to radical Islamic terrorist groups in the already violent Middle East. Many of the same characteristics of Shi’a terrorist groups—the legitimization of violence based on religious precepts, the sense of alienation, the existence of a terrorist movement in which the activists are the constituents, and preoccupation with the elimination of a broadly

---

<sup>17</sup>Marvin Zonis and Daniel Brumberg, “Behind Beirut Terrorism,” *New York Times*, 8 October 1984.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Taheri, *Holy Terror*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in ADL Special Background Report, *Hamas, Islamic Jihad and The Muslim Brotherhood: Islamic Extremists and the Terrorist Threat to America* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>According to The RAND Chronology of International Terrorism between 1982 and 1989 Shi’a terrorist groups committed 247 terrorist incidents but were responsible for 1057 deaths.

defined category of “enemies”—are also apparent among militant Christian white supremacists in the United States and at least some radical Jewish messianic terrorist movements in Israel.

Both groups have described indiscriminate violence not only as morally justified but as an expedient toward the attainment of the religious and racial “purification” of their respective countries. Indeed, the elimination of whole segments of society is in fact a major objective of the white supremacists and, in at least one major incident, was the aim of the Jewish terrorists as well. In 1987, for example, 14 American white supremacists were indicted on federal charges of plotting to engage in indiscriminate, mass killing through the poisoning of municipal water supplies in two major American cities.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in 1984, a group of Israeli religious fanatics were convicted of plotting to blow up the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Islam’s third holiest shrine, in part to provoke a cataclysmic holy war between Moslems and Jews that would force the Jewish Messiah to intervene.<sup>22</sup>

That the Christian white supremacists in the U.S. attempted such an operation is perhaps not surprisingly given the movement’s strident theology.<sup>23</sup> It encompasses a shared hostility to any form of government above the country level; the vilification of Jews and non-whites as “the literal children of Satan;” an obsession with achieving the religious and racial purification of the United States; a belief in a conspiracy theory of powerful Jewish interests controlling the government, banks, and the media; and advocacy of the overthrow of the United States government of “Zionist Occupation Government” (ZOG), as they disparagingly refer to it. The unifying thread in this patchwork of beliefs is the so-called Christian Identity movement.<sup>24</sup> The basic tenants of the Identity movement include the beliefs that Jesus Christ was not a Semite, but an Aryan; that the Lost Tribes of Israel are composed not of Jews, but of “blue eyed Aryans;” that white Anglo-Saxons and not Jews are the true “Chosen People;” and, that the United States is the

---

<sup>21</sup>See *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), April 27, 1987 cited in Bruce Hoffman, *Recent Trends and Future Prospects of Terrorism in the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, R-3618, May 1988), p. 61.

<sup>22</sup>Information provided to the author by an American law enforcement official. See also, Thomas L. Friedman, “Jewish Terrorists Freed By Israeli,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1984; Grace Halsell, “Why Bobby Brown of Brooklyn wants to blow up Al Aqsa,” *Arabia*, August 1984; Martin Merzer, “Justice for all in Israel?” *Miami Herald*, May 17, 1985; and, “Jail Term of Jewish terrorist reduced,” *Jerusalem Post* (International Edition), October 12, 1985. The information pertaining to the terrorists’ desire to provoke a cataclysmic holy war between Moslems and Jews was verified by an American law enforcement officer, involved with the investigation of Jewish terrorist incidents in the U.S. and knowledgeable of the Jerusalem incident.

<sup>23</sup>For a detailed examination of many of these groups, see Michael Barkun, “Racist Apocalypse: Millennialism on the Far Right,” *American Studies* 31 (1990), pp. 121-140. See also, the author’s *Terrorism in the United States and the Potential Threat to Nuclear Facilities* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, R-3351-DOE, January 1986), *Recent Trends and Future Prospects of Terrorism in the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, R-3618, April 1986); and, “Right-Wing Terrorism in the United States,” *VAT Journal*, (Winter 1987).

<sup>24</sup>The Identity movement is based on the Anglo-Israelism movement which emerged in Great Britain during the mid-nineteenth century. Anglo-Israelism embraced the notion that the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel were in fact composed of Anglo-Saxons and not Jews. In contrast to the present-day movement in the United States, this earlier movement was a pacifistic movement.

"Promised Land." In this context, Jews are viewed as impostors and children of Satan who must be exterminated.

At the center of the white supremacists movement has been the organization known as the Aryan Nations and its Church of Jesus Christ-Christian. The ideology espoused by the organization is a mixture of racist and seditious dicta. "*WE BELIEVE*," a brochure entitled *This is Aryan Nations* explains,

there is a battle being fought this day between the children of darkness (today known as Jews) and the children of light (God), the Aryan race, the true Israel of the Bible...

*WE BELIEVE* in the preservation of our race individually and collectively as a people as demanded and directed by God. We believe a racial nation has a right and is under obligation to preserve itself and its members... As His divine race, we have been commissioned to fulfill His divine purpose and plans...

*WE BELIEVE* that there is a day of reckoning. The usurper will be thrown out by the terrible might of Yahweh's people as they return to their roots and their special destiny.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, the "Aryan National State Platform" cites as Article VIII that "A ruthless war must be waged against any whose activities are injurious to the common interest."<sup>26</sup>

This "cleansing" of the United States forms an immutable point of reference for the white supremacists' ideology. "Aliens are pouring over as a floor into *each* of our ancestral lands," Aryan Nations founder and leader Richard Girnt Butler has written, "threatening dispossession of the heritage, culture, and very life blood of our posterity. . . . We know that as we return to our Father's natural Life Order, all power, prosperity, and liberty again comes to us as our possession, to establish justice forever on earth."<sup>27</sup> Robert Matthews, the deceased leader of an Aryan Nations splinter group called The Order, once declared that in order to stem this tide, all Jews, black, Hispanics, other "mud people," along with so-called white "race traitors" must be exterminated in what he described as "a racial and religious Armageddon."<sup>28</sup>

It is particularly alarming that the white supremacists' expressed *raison d'être*--racism, anti-Semitism and sedition--is justified and legitimized on theological grounds. It is at once a political and grassroots religious movement. The leaders of the movement portray themselves as "pastors" and "reverends" and attempt to endow their organizations with a theological veneer that condones and justifies violence. In an article entitled, "An All White Nation?--Why Not?," Roy B. Masker has explained how Aryan Nations members "are in disobedience to our Father and God, Yahwey, for allowing the Nation He gave us to become the mongrelized cesspool in which we

---

<sup>25</sup>*This is Aryan Nations*, brochure distributed by the Aryan Nations (undated).

<sup>26</sup>Aryan Nations, *Calling Our Nation*, No. 53 (undated), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>"To Our New People," Open Letter from Richard G. Butler, Pastor, Aryan Nations (undated).

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in *Washington Post*, 26 December 1984.

now find ourselves . . . . Indeed, it is incumbent upon us to BUILD A NEW, ALL-WHITE NATION! We are under command to do so! All scripture demands it! ,” Masker concludes with the admonition, “Woe to those who stand in the way of the Aryan juggernaut!”<sup>29</sup>

The white supremacists, accordingly, do not appear to exhibit any of the political, moral, or practical considerations that constrain most other terrorist groups from causing mass-scale death and destruction. There are, in fact, striking parallels between these groups and religiously motivated Islamic Shi’a fanatics in the Middle East. Both groups transform abstract political ideologies and objectives into a religious imperative. Violence is not only sanctioned, it is divinely decreed. Hence, the killing of persons described as “infidels” by the Shi’a or as “children of Satan” or “race traitors” by the white supremacists thus becomes a sacramental act.

Although the white supremacists have thus far caused far less death and destruction bloodshed than the Islamic Shi’a terrorists, evidence has come to light that at least some white supremacists had laid plans to engage in indiscriminate, mass killing. According to the federal grand jury indictment previously cited, white supremacists from throughout the United States and Canada met at the Aryan Nations headquarters in Idaho in 1983 to plot the forcible overthrow of the federal government and the creation of a separate Aryan nation within the United States. The indictment states that they planned to “carry out assassinations of federal officials, politicians and Jews, as well as bombings and polluting of municipal water supplies. [my emphasis].<sup>30</sup> Any doubts of their seriousness of purpose were dispelled when police and federal agents raided a white supremacist compound in rural Arkansas in April 1984, and discovered a stockpile of some 30 gallons of cyanide to be used for this purpose.<sup>31</sup>

An identical scenario, in fact, is detailed in the novel, *The Turner Diaries*,<sup>32</sup> which has been cited as “the Bible” of the white supremacists.<sup>33</sup> It describes a chain of events that begins with a white supremacist revolution in 1991 and culminates two years later in “an all-out race war” and worldwide nuclear conflagration. In the book, a terrorist group called The Order embarks on a ruthless campaign of violence involving the assassination of public officials and prominent Jews, the shooting down of commercial airliners, the poisoning of water supplies, and bombings of public utilities. The book reaches its climax when the terrorists seize the U.S. nuclear arsenal and

---

<sup>29</sup>Roy B. Masker, “An All White Nation?--Why Not?,” *Aryan Nations, Calling Our Nation*, No. 53, p. 23.

<sup>30</sup>*Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock), 27 April 1987.

<sup>31</sup>Joseph M. Melnachak, “A Chronicle of Hate: A Brief History of the Radical Right in America,” *TVI Report*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (undated), pp. 41-42. This was also confirmed to me by an FBI agent present at the raid.

<sup>32</sup>Andrew MacDonald, *The Turner Diaries* (Arlington, VA: The National Alliance/National Vanguard Books, 1985).

<sup>33</sup>*New York Times*, 27 December 1984.

obliterate several American cities before turning the weapons against targets in Israel and the Soviet Union.

As incredible and lunatic as the events in *The Turner Diaries* may seem,<sup>34</sup> the strategy of the inchoate terrorist campaign waged in the United States between 1983 and 1984 by Robert Matthews and the real-life Order was based entirely on the battle plan detailed in the book. Furthermore, this apocalyptic vision forms an integral part of the beliefs of many white supremacists today. Whereas most people, for example, harbor deep fears of a nuclear war, many white supremacists appear to welcome the prospect as an opportunity to eliminate their avowed “enemies” and permit the fulfillment of their objectives to create a new world order peopled exclusively by the white race.

The self-described purpose of one of the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord’s former compound at Mountain Home, Arkansas (where the cyanide was discovered), for example, was “to build an Ark for God’s people during the coming tribulations on the earth.”<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the 100 or so men, women and children who lived in the compound prepared themselves for the coming Armageddon by stockpiling weapons, food, and valuables, and undergoing training in survivalist techniques and guerrilla warfare. As Terry Noble, a pastor and spokesman for the group once explained, “We are Christian survivalists who believe in preparing for the ultimate holocaust . . . . The coming war is a step toward God’s government.”<sup>36</sup>

A similar millenarian and apocalyptic vision is also evident in the belief system of a group of Jewish fanatics who plotted to blow up the Dome of the Rock in 1984. Significantly, the Jewish messianic terrorists like their white supremacist counterparts specifically sought the approval and sanction of their religious authorities. Indeed, the Jewish terrorists repeatedly made it clear to their leaders that they could not implement the group’s battle plan without rabbinical blessing. When such permission was forthcoming, it was initially implemented in the noontime assault on an Islamic college in Hebron in July 1983, where three students were killed and 33 others wounded. Emboldened by the success of this operation and armed once again with rabbinic dispensation, the Jewish terrorists plotted an even more ambitious attack: the simultaneous bombings of buses carrying Arab passengers home on the Muslim sabbath. The plot was to attach explosive devices to the gas tanks of five buses that would be set to detonate at a time and place calculated to minimize the risk to any Jewish passersby. The bombs—and their placement beneath the fuel tanks—were designed to cause maximum destruction to the vehicles and death to their passengers. The operation, however, was foiled by the Israeli security

---

<sup>34</sup>Turner’s tale, although fictional, is in many ways like kind with Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which was not taken seriously at the time, only to be turned into terrible reality a mere ten years after its publication.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, *Hate Groups in America: A Record of Bigotry and Violence* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, 1982), p. 52.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 51 and 53.

service—with the arrests of the bombers leading to the discovery of the Temple Mount plot. As Sprinzak points out in his study of the Jewish terrorist movement:

rabbinical involvement in the terror acts that did and did not take place [during this period] is of crucial importance. It tells us that the radicalization process that finally produced terrorism within Gush Emunim [the radical Israeli settlers' movement, from which the terrorists came] was not marginal but central. . . . [Moreover] a combination of messianic belief and a situation of continual national conflict with a built-in propensity for incremental violence resulted in extralegalism, vigilantism, selective terrorism, and finally, *indiscriminate mass terrorism* [my emphasis].<sup>37</sup>

Although millenarian and apocalyptic visions are less apparent in Sikh terrorism, the bloodshed currently unfolding in India's Punjab region nonetheless provides further evidence of the relationship between "holy terror" and increased lethality. The Sikhs, a modern-day offshoot of a Hindu reform movement founded in the Punjab four hundred years ago, are an amalgamation of different beliefs and practices lacking a strong theology of its own. As such, the Sikh faith has long struggled to differentiate itself and its followers from Hinduism: placing a strong emphasis on prominent religious symbols and means of personal identification involving the Golden Temple and sacred scriptures and individual accoutrements such as the wearing of the turban, long hair and beards, and carrying a dagger.<sup>38</sup> Foremost among the Sikh's aims is independence from India and the establishment of a revitalized Sikh nation, called Khalistan—literally, "Land of the Pure." In this regard, the group has sought to cleanse the Punjab of "foreign influences;" an aim that led to the murder of 16 executives and technicians at a textile factory partly-owned by the American multi-national company, DuPont, in March 1992. An estimated 20,000 persons have been killed as result of Sikh violence during the past decade. In 1991 alone, a record 4,700 deaths occurred in the Punjab. Although the majority of the fatalities were members of the region's Hindu minority population, fellow Sikhs judged as traitors or apostates have also been targeted. The Sikh attacks, one observer notes, are almost "entirely indiscriminate nature," with crowded passenger trains a favorite target. One hundred Hindu passengers were killed and 70 injured in two such attacks in 1991—additional attacks on rail traffic have individually claimed the lives of more than 50 persons and wounded upwards of 70 others.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 98-99.

<sup>38</sup>Bernard Imhasly, "A Decade of Terrorism in the Punjab," *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, March 1991, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup>Ian Greig, "The Punjab: Plagued By Terror," *Conflict International*, July 1992.

### **Conclusion: Likely Future Trends of “Holy War”**

In the past, most analyses of the possibility of mass indiscriminate killing involving chemical, biological, or nuclear terrorism have tended to discount it for several reasons. Few terrorists, it has been argued, know anything about the technical intricacies of either developing or then dispersing such weapons and the internal dynamics and decision making processes of terrorist groups were seen to inhibit sudden escalations or changes in either tactics or level of violence. Political, moral, and practical considerations were also perceived as important restraints on terrorist use of such weapons of mass destruction. It was also argued that there are few realistic demands that terrorists could make that could not be achieved by using or threatening to use more conventional weapons. Finally, and perhaps most important, as Brian Jenkins long ago noted, “simply killing a lot of people has seldom been one terrorist objective . . . Terrorists operate on the principle of the minimum force necessary. They find it unnecessary to kill many, as long as killing a few suffices for their purposes.”<sup>40</sup> While arguably still pertinent to most secular terrorists, these arguments seem less relevant to religious terrorists.

Moreover, today, when old empires and countries are crumbling and new ones are being built and when new assertions of religious and ethnic identity are made with uncompromising ferocity, the possession of a nuclear bomb or the development of a chemical or biological warfare capability may become increasingly attractive either to new nations seeking to preserve their sovereignty or to would-be nations seeking to attain their independence. In both instances, terrorists may find new roles for their skills and expertise. Terrorists may be employed by countries either to steal nuclear weapons or strategic material from another country or themselves be paid to stage a covert nuclear, chemical, or biological attack in order to conceal the involvement or complicity of their state patron. In the future, terrorists may become the “ultimate fifth column”: a clandestine, cost-effective, force used to wage war covertly against more powerful rivals or to subvert neighboring countries or hostile regimes. In this respect, the lesson of Iraq’s overt invasion of Kuwait loom large.

In particular, ethnic/religious fanaticism could more easily allow terrorists to overcome the psychological barriers to mass murder than a radical political agenda has in the past. Indeed, as contemporary terrorism is increasingly perpetrated by organizations with a predominant religious motivation or imperative, it is not unwarranted to look at these groups the most likely to cross this threshold. Among the incidents one can hypothesize are preemptive strikes utilizing weapons of mass destruction against allegedly predatory majorities or decisive blows dealt against ethnic or religious rivals before the international community can begin to debate, much less intervene, in a nascent conflict.

---

<sup>40</sup>Brian M. Jenkins, *The Likelihood of Nuclear Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, P-7119, July 1985), p. 6.

The volatile combination of religion and terrorism has been cited as one of the main reasons for terrorism's increased lethality. The fact that for the religious terrorist violence inevitably assumes a transcendent purpose and therefore becomes a sacramental or divine duty arguably results in a significant loosening of the constraints on the commission of mass murder. Religion, moreover, functions as a legitimizing force, sanctioning if not encouraging wide scale violence against an almost open-ended category of opponents. Thus religious terrorist violence becomes almost an end in itself—a morally justified, divinely instigated expedient toward the attainment of the terrorists' ultimate ends. This is a direct reflection of the fact that terrorists motivated by a religious imperative do not seek to appeal to any constituency but themselves and the changes they seek are not for any utilitarian purpose, but are only to benefit themselves. The religious terrorist moreover sees himself as an outsider from the society that he both abhors and rejects and this sense of alienation enables him to contemplate—and undertake—far more destructive and bloodier types of terrorist operations than his secular counterpart.

Given this constellation of characteristics, and convergence of motives and capabilities what targets might religious terrorists attack in the future and what tactics will they use? Predicting the future is arguably no less risky than defusing a terrorist bomb, but if indeed, “past is prologue,” the future quite likely holds a number of chilling possibilities. First and foremost, in light of a series of seemingly unconnected terrorist incidents that occurred between last January and March—involving the bombing of New York City's World Trade Center, evidence of the existence of a nascent Abu Nidal terrorist infrastructure in the United States, the chain bombings that shook Bombay, and the mysterious—still unexplained—shootings that occurred outside the CIA headquarters in Langley last January—we may have to revise our notions of the stereotypical terrorist organization. In the past, terrorist groups were recognizable as a group of individuals belonging to an organization with a defined command and control apparatus, who were engaged in conspiracy as a full-time avocation, living underground and constantly planning and plotting terrorist attacks perhaps under the direct control or at the behest of a foreign government. The seemingly amateurish World Trade Center bombers, however, may be the model of a new kind of terrorist group: a more or less ad hoc amalgamation of like-minded individuals—united by their religious beliefs and place of worship—who merely gravitate towards one another for a specific, perhaps even one time, operation. Essentially, part-time terrorists, such loose groups of individuals, may be indirectly influenced or remotely controlled by some foreign non-governmental or governmental entity. This new breed of part-time terrorists may represent even more of a threat than their predecessors. While less control from some central command authority may be exerted, this may also result in fewer constraints on the terrorists' operations and targets and

fewer inhibitions on their desire to inflict indiscriminate casualties.<sup>41</sup> The transnational Islamic extremist terrorist group, now active in the United States, known as *Fuqra* further illustrates this phenomenon. The group, an elitist religious sect originally from Pakistan, is believed to have been responsible for 17 bombings and assassinations since 1979 that have killed at least 12 persons. Some 1-3,000 members of the sect are scattered in compounds throughout the U.S. from which they wage a sporadic campaign against rival Muslim sects, Laotian Buddhist temples, Hindu temples, Jewish targets and all others they deem heretics, infidels or both.<sup>42</sup>

More specifically, the targets and tactics of "holy terror" operations that have occurred or been attempted during the past decade suggest the following manifestations of religious terrorism might materialize in far more ominous and destructive forms:

- Poisoning of the water supplies of major urban centers such as the American white supremacists have plotted and terrorists in India are alleged to have contemplated as well;
- Dispersal of toxic chemicals through internal building ventilation systems such as white supremacist "skin heads" attempted in Arizona;
- Indiscriminate, wanton attacks on crowded, busy urban centers such as Muslim terrorists are alleged to have done in Bombay this past February and March, killing more than 400 persons and injuring more than a 1,000 others;
- Attacks on power grids and attempts to disrupt electrical power to large population areas such as *Fuqra* did in Colorado ; and,
- Poisoning of food as followers of the Bagwhan Rajneesh did in Oregon in order to influence a local election.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, we may also be on the cusp of a new, and potentially more dangerous, era of terrorism as the year 2000—the literal millennium—approaches. One cannot predict the effect that this pivotal symbolic watershed might have on religion-inspired terrorist groups who feel

---

<sup>41</sup>Israeli authorities have noted this same pattern has emerged among terrorists belonging to the *Hamas* organization currently active in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in contrast to the more professional, centrally-controlled members of the mainstream Palestine Liberation Organization terrorist groups.. As one senior Israeli security official recently noted of a particularly vicious band of *Hamas* terrorists: they "were a suprisingly unprofessional bunch . . . they had no preliminary training and acted without specific instructions." See Joel Greenberg, "Israel Arrests 4 In Police Death," *New York Times*, June 7, 1993; and Eric Silver, "The Shin Bet's 'Winning' Battle," *The Jewish Journal* (Los Angeles), June 11-17, 1993.

<sup>42</sup>The most detailed published account of *Fuqra*'s history and activities can be found in Knut Royce, "Black Muslim Sect Scrutinized," *New York Newsday*, June 27, 1993.

<sup>43</sup>Secular terrorists, it should be noted, have also attempted to poison food supplies, such as the Palestinian terrorists who poisoned Israeli oranges with mercury in 1979; the Tamil guerrillas who claimed to have contaminated Sri Lankan tea shipments in 1986; and, Chilean terrorists who claimed to have poisoned grapes exported from that country in 1988.

impelled either to hasten the redemption associated with the millenium through acts of violence or, in the event that the year 2000 passes and redemption does not occur, to attempt to implement Armageddon by the apocalyptic use of weapons of mass destruction.

RAND/P-7834

"HOLY TERROR": THE IMPLICATIONS OF TERRORISM MOTIVATED BY A RELIGIOUS IMPERATIVE

Hoffman