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The Life Course of Apocalyptic Groups

Author Biography

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Abstract

Apocalyptic groups have launched attacks in the past, which if competently executed, would have been catastrophic. The security community needs a greater understanding of when law enforcement or the military should intercept dangerous apocalyptic groups. This comparative case analysis explores the length of time apocalyptic groups remain in existence, and when, during their life-span, they cross the threshold to catastrophic violence. The apocalyptic groups examined in this paper are centrally focused on the expectation of end-times or they seek to catalyze its arrival in ways that offend laws or social norms.



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The Life Course of Apocalyptic Groups

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ABSTRACT

Apocalyptic groups have launched attacks in the past, which if competently executed, would have been catastrophic. The security community needs a greater understanding of when law enforcement or the military should intercept dangerous apocalyptic groups. This comparative case analysis explores the length of time apocalyptic groups remain in existence, and when, during their life-span, they cross the threshold to catastrophic violence. The apocalyptic groups examined in this paper are centrally focused on the expectation of end-times or they seek to catalyze its arrival in ways that offend laws or social norms

INTRODUCTION

Apocalyptic movements are security threats because they are prone to seek catastrophic effects on society.¹ A greater understanding of when to interdict these groups is important because they have launched attacks in the past, which if competently executed, would have been catastrophic.² Failure to understand the developmental trajectory of these groups creates a reactionary orientation to them and leaves security to chance that these groups will not be competent in the future to execute a catastrophic attack. A better understanding of apocalyptic group life span is necessary to decide when to engage these groups.

Engaging apocalyptic groups can be fraught with peril because these groups have a readiness to see law enforcement intervention as fulfillment of their prophecies.³ The apocalyptic believer may see law enforcement intervention as fulfillment of apocalyptic expectations and reason for all-out resistance or the execution of latent terrorist plans. Understanding apocalyptic group life span will provide perspective on when and how to approach these groups. Further delineation in this regard is necessary because these groups do not represent a uniform typology. Apocalyptic groups can be inwardly destructive instead of outwardly destructive, or they may have a defensive orientation rather than an offensive orientation as they await their apocalyptic moment in time.

The purpose of this comparative case analysis is to explore the length of time apocalyptic groups remain in existence, and when, during their life span, they cross the threshold to catastrophic violence. This study defines apocalyptic group life span as extending from the group's inception (the year the group emerged) to its end (the year the group dissolved). Hypotheses generated from the cases can inform the conceptualization of apocalyptic groups and their proclivity to launch catastrophic attacks. The research questions ask, "What is the typical life-span of an apocalyptic group?" and "When is the best time for the security community to interdict these groups before they attempt a catastrophic attack?"

The scope of this study is broad. Apocalyptic groups, also known as millenarian groups, can range from benign to lethal. The term apocalyptic refers to what will happen at the end of time, which is usually some catastrophe, such as a large war or a natural disaster.⁴ The term millenarianism refers to what is to come after—and as a function of—the apocalypse, which is a time of perpetual peace and resolution of perennial difficulties.⁵ Groups with an apocalyptic worldview include religious sects, cults, and terrorist organizations. This study does not consider those

world religions that observe end times eschatology to be apocalyptic. Rather, apocalyptic groups examined in this article focus centrally on the expectation of end-times or seek to catalyze its arrival in ways that offend laws or social norms. This may include sects or splinter groups of the major world religions, but the world religions have messages beyond apocalyptic thinking, and are not examined in this study.

The hypotheses generated from this study have implications throughout the security community. Military and intelligence stakeholders can benefit from this article, as can various levels of law enforcement. Military and intelligence stakeholders will likely discover the results useful if planning to engage an organization with an apocalyptic worldview. A contemporary example is the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is a militant apocalyptic group.⁶ Understanding the developmental trajectories of apocalyptic groups may offer insight into early warnings and indications, which could provide the upper hand in anticipating an attack.

WHY STUDY APOCALYPTIC GROUPS?

The rationale for this study is based on the observation that many apocalyptic groups are not rational actors amenable to deterrence strategies.⁷ This observation reflects a rational choice model, which posits that rational actors seek to maximize personal utility net of cost.⁸ Apocalyptic groups, according to this model, are likely to be unresponsive to the typical levers of power because they actively anticipate a catastrophic confrontation where their net loss is unsustainable. Greater understanding of these groups is therefore needed to anticipate their behavior. It is a faulty assumption to presume these groups would not unleash a mass casualty attack because it would alienate them from some constituency. Apocalyptic groups are not necessarily bound to a social constituency, so they may not operate according to the same set of constraints that impinge upon terrorists who have political ambitions.

The difficulty al-Qaeda core had in controlling Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) illustrates the dialectic between terrorist groups with a strategic agenda and those with an apocalyptic ideology. Zarqawi was reluctant to swear allegiance to al-Qaeda, and after he did, al-Qaeda leadership frequently scorned him for taking actions, such as targeting Shiites, in furtherance of his apocalyptic vision rather than remaining in close consort with al-Qaeda core's strategic mission.⁹ Zarqawi's steadfastness in maintaining true to his apocalyptic ideology despite

it drawing the scorn of al-Qaeda leadership illustrates the importance of understanding apocalyptic thinking within the context of terrorist organizations. As AQL demonstrated, terrorist groups with an apocalyptic vision can act as jihadist free riders who partake in the jihadist global insurgency but who will act in furtherance of their apocalyptic vision irrespective of any larger, coordinated jihadist strategy.

Apocalyptic group research has a gap in the literature that overlooks the life span of these organizations. Though scholars have noted that these groups do not fit into a rational-actor model and that the whim of a charismatic leader often drives them, there is a dearth of literature on what these groups look like from their inception to their end.¹⁰ There is no clear delineation of critical milestones in the development of these groups that may forewarn of catastrophic action. Failure to understand when and why apocalyptic groups take action led to Aum Shinrikyo launching chemical and biological attacks across Japan in the 1990's without warning. The only reason these attacks did not produce mass casualties was because of Aum Shinrikyo's incompetence in these endeavors.¹¹ Aum Shinrikyo was unable to effectively procure, prepare, package, or deploy the botulinum toxin, anthrax, Q fever, Ebola, nuclear explosives, and sarin with their intended effects, though the group made persistent attempts. Interestingly, Aum Shinrikyo's early failures in these endeavors did not decisively hone the attention of Japanese authorities, which could have interdicted the group before it launched its 1995 sarin attack.¹²

A greater understanding of apocalyptic groups is particularly important now when globalization is likely to influence millenarian beliefs as cultures continue to collide and face fundamental changes or extinction.¹³ The potential therefore exists that more apocalyptic groups may emerge in the future. Furthermore, greater understanding of apocalyptic group behavior is relevant to the current terrorist threat from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The Islamic State is an apocalyptic group that has already shown that it is not averse to committing mass atrocities.¹⁴ The rapid dissolution of the ISIS caliphate in the Middle East will leave the group desperate for a dramatic impact, so understanding the group's behavior as it relates to its apocalyptic mindset may help avert a catastrophic attack in the future.

APOCALYPTIC CONTEXT

Apocalyptic and millenarian movements have occurred throughout history. These movements occur outside the context of cults or terrorist

organizations as well as within them.¹⁵ Apocalyptic thinking is found in cultures, societies, or groups that experience oppressive conditions or social decay.¹⁶ Oppressed groups, such as the colonized Incan civilization of the sixteenth century and the indigent members of People's Temple of the twentieth century, may look to apocalyptic visions for hope, while those that experience social decay may look to apocalyptic visions for a corrective solution to seemingly permanent immoral behavior. The need for an absolute end to a hopeless state of affairs and a corresponding renewal sets the stage for the anticipated cosmic war that is common to apocalyptic movements. The cosmic war motif describes an epic, divinely authorized battle between good and evil in a world gone awry.¹⁷ This motif is identifiable in the way diverse groups of apocalyptic terrorists view the world, including Sikhs in India, Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, Kach in Israel, and Islamic groups in the Middle East.¹⁸

Apocalyptic terrorism gained greater attention in the 1990's.¹⁹ The distinction between this type of terrorism and the more traditional terrorism was becoming clearer as the new millennium approached. The greatest distinction seemed to lie in the desire of apocalyptically inspired terrorists to destroy the existing order and to engage in indiscriminate killing to do so. These new terrorists were increasingly dangerous because the sociopolitical restraints that kept the old terrorists in check no longer applied.²⁰ These new terrorists were only accountable to their deity, so the amount of carnage they could theoretically inflict was difficult to estimate but extensive if they were to acquire WMD. Despite the apprehension caused by the emergence of apocalyptic inspired terrorists at the end of the twentieth century, this sort of terrorist was still considered to be in the minority and their threat was even considered to be overstated by serious thinkers in the field.²¹

Cults that hold apocalyptic beliefs can also be dangerous because they see the world in dichotomous terms, their judgment is blinded, and, to them, the law is relative.²² Apocalyptic cults form the basis of their worldviews by distorting the writings found in the major religions or other systems of belief. For example, People's Temple and the Branch Davidians distorted the Christian religion, while Heaven's Gate based its actions on belief in UFO's. Cults with an apocalyptic vision, and terrorist groups for that matter, have a greater proclivity for violence when led by a charismatic-millennarian leader.²³

Cults, or New Religious Movements (NRM), tend to synthesize different religious and philosophical traditions to create their own atmosphere of community, belief, and emotional gratification.²⁴ The proliferation of cults

is the result of cultural integration, transformation, and globalization.²⁵ Cults offer psychological and social rewards for people with vulnerabilities in psychosocial areas who are left confused by the disorganization created by a rapidly changing society.²⁶ The potential for violence exists with cults when the cult leadership or vision is questionable.

CASES

Peoples Temple

Jim Jones founded People's Temple in 1956 with a group of 20 followers.²⁷ Jones was a charismatic leader who engaged in physical, sexual, and psychological abuse of his followers. After ongoing media scrutiny, Jones moved his group to Guyana where People's Temple owned land. In April of 1978, a group of "Concerned Relatives" officially accused Jim Jones of human rights violations.²⁸ In November 1978, US Congressman Leo Ryan arrived at Jonestown with members of the media and Concerned Relatives to investigate his constituency's claims about the cult. The delegation publicly questioned Jones, and some cult members chose to defect and leave with the delegation. On November 18, 1978, members of People's Temple attacked the delegation at the airstrip as it was leaving Guyana, which resulted in five dead and twelve wounded. Later that day, Jim Jones ordered his group to drink poisoned cool-aid, resulting in the death of 909 people.

Branch Davidians

The Davidians were an offshoot of the Seventh Day Adventist religious sect, but the Davidians' beliefs significantly deviated from their parent group throughout the cult's existence, and even more after Koresh assumed leadership of the group. The sect experienced fragmentation until 1978, at which time the cult most closely resembled the Branch Davidians that Koresh eventually took over. On February 28, 1993, Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents deployed to the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, to arrest Koresh on weapons and explosives charges.²⁹ A standoff immediately ensued. During negotiations, Koresh became uncooperative and preached excessively to the negotiators and claimed to have special knowledge of the apocalypse.³⁰ On April 19, 1993, a lethal fire erupted in the compound. Arson investigations concluded that the fire began in the inside at multiple points of origin with flame accelerants applied to instigate the fire.

Solar Temple

Luc Jouret and Joseph Di Mambro founded the Order of the Solar Temple, or Solar Temple, in 1986.³¹ Characterizations of Solar Temple describe a cult that was a syncretic mixture of religion, esoteric traditions, and paranormal beliefs.³² Jouret proclaimed that the end of the world was approaching and only the part of Quebec, Canada, where his group was located would survive. On October 4, 1994, Di Mambro had a defector, the defector's wife, and their infant son killed in an eccentric stabbing ritual. Twelve hours later, investigators found twenty-two people in Switzerland in a burning house—nineteen of whom had a gunshot wound to the head—and arranged in a star-like ceremonial formation while wearing Solar Temple garb. Hours later elsewhere in Switzerland investigators found twenty-five bodies dead from injection of poison. All the adults were part of the Solar Temple, including Di Mambro and Jouret. Five of the dead were children. In December 1995, investigators discovered sixteen people in a similar ceremonial lying of bodies with gunshot wounds and set on fire. In March 22, 1997, investigators found five more people burned in a Solar Temple ritual.

Aum Shinrikyo

Aum Shinrikyo began in Japan in 1984 as a fifteen-member meditation group.³³ The guru of the group and its founder was the charismatic Shoko Asahara. Aum Shinrikyo began receiving unfavorable media coverage as it progressed, and an Aum Shinrikyo Victim's Society emerged. Asahara's paranoia increased with the activities of the Victim's Society, which prompted him to order members to kill the Victim Society's attorney, Tsutsumi Sakamoto. On November 4, 1989, group members killed Sakamoto, but they also killed his wife and child. Asahara continued to expand Aum Shinrikyo and sent candidates from the group to seek national election in the Japanese government, but they decisively lost at the polls.³⁴ After this defeat, Asahara became overtly apocalyptic in his thinking. Asahara believed that he had to "liberate" the people by killing them or using poison as a societal purgative.

Aum Shinrikyo began its weapons development and procurement activities in 1990. At this time, the group attempted to deploy the botulinum toxin by driving a vehicle and spraying the toxin indiscriminately.³⁵ In 1992, Aum Shinrikyo members traveled to Zaire to obtain a culture of the Ebola virus. In 1993, Aum Shinrikyo used a crude pumping system to deploy the anthrax toxin from the roof of one of its buildings with little success. At around this time, Aum Shinrikyo solicited Russian sources for nuclear and chemical weapons, while also searching

for radioactive material in various locations. Some believe that a Russian weapons expert gave the group a blueprint for sarin.³⁶ Aum Shinrikyo continued its attacks on opponents during this time and in 1994 released sarin near judges who presided over a land dispute case to which Aum was a party. Seven people died because of this attack and hundreds sustained injuries. On March 20, 1995, Aum Shinrikyo released sarin in a Tokyo, Japan, and subway killing thirteen and injuring hundreds of people. Surprisingly, Aum Shinrikyo received many protections under Japanese law because of its religious classification so the Japanese government did not purposely disband Aum Shinrikyo even after its subway attack. In 2000, Aum Shinrikyo changed its name to Aleph and underwent a significant transformation of its mission and vision. The organization known as Aleph is no longer recognizable as Aum Shinrikyo because of the significant changes.

Heaven's Gate

Bonnie Nettles and Marshall Applewhite founded Heaven's Gate in 1975.³⁷ Their ideology was a syncretic version of Revelation theology and UFO folklore. Defections occurred within their following as their predictions failed to materialize. The rebuke of their prophetic ability prompted the group to move into seclusion in Wyoming. The group lived in seclusion for sixteen years, and in 1991 resurfaced when it produced a video series on humans and UFO's. In 1993, the group purchased ad space in major newspapers and local and alternative periodicals to disseminate the group's message. In 1994, the group made several talks around the United States about the importance of joining Heaven's Gate to ensure a proper "exiting." The group went back into seclusion in 1995 and did not have any media attention until March 1997. Starting on March 23, 1997, and ending on March 26, 1997, the group committed mass suicide by consuming barbiturates with alcohol and asphyxiating themselves. The group committed suicide in waves such that the wave to follow the group before would clean up after the deceased members and arrange them in a ceremonial manner. The group believed that it was departing earth for a different level of existence. Thirty-nine people died at the end of the group's mass suicide.

Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments

The Movement for the Restoration for the Ten Commandments began in 1989 by a few ex-communicated Catholic Church priests and nuns. The group's main belief was to restore the Ten Commandments to its original prominence. Joseph Kibwetere was the chief visionary of the group and promulgated visions he stated were from heaven. P. M. Venter examined

the events surrounding the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments' implosion that resulted in mass murder-suicide.³⁸ The group believed that the world would end on December 31, 1999, and at such time all people on earth would perish, while the group members would transport to heaven. When the end of the world did not occur on December 31 as predicted, Kibwetere changed the date to March 17, 2000. Venter believes that group members began to question Kibwetere when his prediction did not occur, and they requested their money and possessions back and their release from the group. Days before March 17, 2000, the group murdered eight would-be secessionists by blunt trauma and poison and dumped their bodies in a mass grave. Their challenge to the group leader's fragile psyche appeared to be a major precipitant to Kibwetere's tragic decision for the group. On March 17, 2000, the group entered their church, which already had its windows boarded from the outside. Once inside, the members locked the doors and a catastrophic explosion occurred that destroyed the church and its members.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi formed al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in 2004 from the terrorist network he led since 2000. Zarqawi reluctantly swore allegiance to bin Laden and formed AQI. Zarqawi's group was a major force in the Iraq insurgency and quickly gained notoriety from both coalition forces and Muslims in Iraq. Zarqawi's ideology led him to vehemently target Shiites and generally have little concern about killing other Muslims in his attacks. Zarqawi's ideology was at odds with the basic tenets of the Iraqi nationalist insurgency, which alienated him from other groups in Iraq. Zarqawi's ideology was decidedly apocalyptic. He viewed his participation in the Iraq insurgency as part of a cosmic battle between Muslims and Byzantine Christians, and he sought to attack Shia Muslims in accordance with Sunni apocalyptic prophecy. A coalition forces airstrike killed Zarqawi on June 7, 2006. After Zarqawi's death, AQI's organizational structure became more bureaucratic and institutionalized. The group also demonstrated significantly fewer attacks after his death. The Global Terrorism Database indicates AQI's last terrorist attack was on September 25, 2011.³⁹ After this time, AQI splintered with a significant portion becoming the Islamic State in Iraq.

Soldiers of Heaven

The Soldiers of Heaven formed in Najaf, Iraq, in 1990. The group's leader, a messianic figure named Diya Abdul-Zahra Kadhim, wanted to create mass violence to bring about the Hidden Imam consistent with Islamic theology.⁴⁰ Some reports suggest that Kadhim believed that he was the

Hidden Imam.⁴¹ The cult remained obscure to residents of the Najaf area, but residents noticed activity within the group increase after the 2003 Iraq invasion. Iraqi authorities eventually received information that the group was planning an attack during the Shiite festival of Ashoura. On January 29, 2007, Iraqi forces approached the group's compound with the intention of questioning or arresting members of the group. The Iraqi force came under heavy attack when it neared the compound and called for coalition support. The battle lasted for twenty-four hours and resulted in the death of 350 members of the group.⁴²

METHODS

This study used a comparative case analysis methodology. The comparative case method is useful to draw inferences from case-based material. The unit of analysis, or case, in this methodology is apocalyptic group. There are eight cases in this analysis: People's Temple, Branch Davidians, Solar Temple, Aum Shinrikyo, Heaven's Gate, Movement Restoration, al-Qaeda in Iraq, and Soldiers of Heaven. The cases inform seven variables. The variables examined are Years Existing, Years to Violence, Violence Precipitant, Violent Action, Total Deaths from First Mass Violence Episode, Precipitant to Dissolution, End of Group.

This study used a purposive sampling method of case selection. Purposive sampling is useful for selecting information-rich cases that allow exploration of the phenomena under study and subsequent comparison and contrast of the phenomena.⁴³ Exploring books, journals, websites, and search engines identified cases. The cases in this study had the following characteristics: Apocalyptic thinking central to group; group committed mass violence; group has terminated. The tendency for some apocalyptic groups to linger rather than to dissolve prohibited them from inclusion. For instance, the Israeli apocalyptic terrorist group Kach has not committed a large-scale terrorist attack since 1994, but there is indication that the group still exists.⁴⁴ Since there is no reported end date for Kach, it was not included in the case analysis.⁴⁵

The cases selected for exploration were modern apocalyptic groups. Modern apocalyptic groups are more likely to share cohort effects, so the data they yield may be of greater benefit to hypotheses about other contemporary apocalyptic groups. This study used explanation building to analyze the data. Explanation building starts with observations and creates an understanding of what is happening with the data and why.⁴⁶ This study also used an interpretive approach to understand the motives driving each case.⁴⁷

Coding

Years Existing is simply the amount of years the group has been active from its beginning year to its ending year. Years to Violence is the amount of time that transpired from the group’s beginning to its first episode of mass violence. This study defines mass violence as the killing, or attempted killing, of three or more people at one time. Violence Precipitant is the event that stands in temporal relation to the mass violence. Type of Violent Action is the characterization of the violence that occurred. Number Deaths First Mass Violence is the number of deaths that occurred during the group’s first episode of mass violence. Precipitant Dissolution is the event that temporally preceded the group’s dissolution. End of Group is the characterization of the group’s dissolution. Table 1 examines these variables in relation to each group.

Table 1. Case Comparison Matrix.

CASE	YEARS EXISTING	YEARS TO VIOLENCE	VIOLENCE PRECIPITANT	VIOLENT ACTION	FIRST MASS DEATH	PRECIPITANT DISSOLUTION	END OF GROUP
People’s Temple	22	22	Psychological Affront	Murder-Suicide	909	Psychological Affront	Total Dissolution
Branch Davidian	15	15	Armed Confrontation	Murder-Suicide	80	Armed Confrontation	Total Dissolution
Solar Temple	11	8	Psychological Affront	Murder-Suicide	50	Psychological Affront	Drain of Members
Aum Shinrikyo	16	5	Psychological Affront	Murder	3	Legal Sanctions	Splinter
Heaven’s Gate	22	22	Enactment of End Plan	Suicide	39	Enactment of End Plan	Total Dissolution
Move Restore	11	11	Psychological Affront	Murder	8	Psychological Affront	Total Dissolution
AQI	7	0.7	Enactment of End Plan	Murder	11	Death of Key Leader	Splinter
Soldiers Heaven	17	17	Armed Confrontation	Died Fighting	350	Armed Confrontation	Total Dissolution

Source: Author.

One limitation to this study relates to a common weakness in the comparative case analysis design—external validity. External validity refers to the degree to which findings generalize to other cases. As such, caution must be used when attempting to apply findings from the cases examined in this study to less similar cases. For instance, activity observed in mostly Western apocalyptic groups may not fully generalize

to non-Western groups. Another limitation to the present study is the issue of case selection. The cases examined in this article were purposefully selected rather than randomly selected consistent with the purposive sampling method.

RESULTS

This study examined eight cases. Some of the cases resembled each other quite closely, while others appeared different. For example, many of the groups had an inward orientation and focused on the intense relationship between members of the group and the group leader. People's Temple and Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments resembled each other in this manner. Other groups had more of an outward orientation and those groups tended towards terrorist and insurgent activity, such as Aum Shinrikyo, AQI, and Soldiers of Heaven.

Years in Existence

The average (mean) years in existence for the apocalyptic groups examined in this article is 15.1 years. The shortest existence for an apocalyptic group was AQI, which was 7 years. The longest groups in existence were People's Temple and Heaven's Gate, both of which lasted 22 years. Table 2 displays the averages for all variables.

Table 2. Group Averages.

CASE	YEARS EXISTING	YEARS TO VIOLENCE	VIOLENCE PRECIPITANT	VIOLENT ACTION	FIRST MASS DEATH	PRECIPITANT DISSOLUTION	END OF GROUP
All Cases	15.1	12.5	Psychological Affront	Murder-Suicide; Murder	44.5	Psychological Affront	Total Dissolution

Source: Author.

Years to Mass Violence

The average (mean) years to violence for the groups examined in this study were 12.5 years. The group that had the shortest amount of time to mass violence was AQI, which was 0.7 years, and the groups with the longest time to mass violence were People's Temple and Heaven's Gate, both of which were 22 years.

Precipitant to Mass Violence

The most frequently occurring precipitant to violence for the groups examined in this article was Psychological Affront (four groups).

Psychological Affront represents a perception based, rather than material, threat to the group or its leader. For example, People's Temple experienced a Psychological Affront when Representative Leo Ryan visited its compound and publicly questioned the group and its leader. This may have left the perception that the group lacked the omnipotence that its leader proclaimed it to have. Furthermore, the test of the group leader in such a public manner challenged his unquestioned authority. The fact that a handful of group members sought to defect with the Congressman was a further blow to the perceived omnipotence of the group. Even though a handful of members sought to defect, this was not a material loss to a group of nearly 1,000 people. The challenge to the integrity of the group during this Psychological Affront may have been sufficient to destabilize it and precipitate mass murder-suicide.

Other groups' precipitant to mass violence was Armed Confrontation. Armed Confrontation is a confrontation with the group or its leader where some armed authority seeks to detain or attack the group or its leader. Some groups' precipitant to mass violence was Enactment of End Plan. Enactment of End Plan occurred when the group's actions followed its main objectives. As such, the group simply behaved according to its end-plan. Both Heaven's Gate and AQL had this as a precipitant. Heaven's Gate's mass suicide was consistent with its plan and AQL's murderous activity was consistent with AQL's terrorist plans.

Type of Violent Action

The Type of Violent Action enacted by the apocalyptic groups examined in this article was bifurcated. Murder (three groups) and Murder-Suicide (three groups) occurred during the groups' first episodes of mass violence. The violent action for one group was strictly suicide and the violent action for another group was death in battle.

Total Deaths from First Violent Episode

The average (median) number of total deaths from the first episode of mass violence for the groups examined in this article was 44.5. The range for total deaths at the groups' first episodes was vast and ranged from three to 909. This reflects the observation that for some apocalyptic groups the whole group perished in the first mass violence episode.

Precipitant to Dissolution

The most frequently occurring Precipitant to Dissolution for the apocalyptic groups examined in this article was Psychological Affront (three groups). One hypothesis for this is that a perceived (as opposed

to material) threat to the integrity of the group or its leader triggered the downfall of these groups. For example, the failed prophecies of Movement's leader caused dissension and defection, and this threat to the integrity of the leader and group stimulated mass violence in the form of murder of the dissenters and then murder-suicide of the whole group.

Armed Confrontation was the Precipitant to Dissolution for two groups. In these cases, Armed Confrontation triggered a final standoff that resulted in the group's downfall. Legal Sanctions was the Precipitant to Dissolution for one group, which meant that the legal institutions stimulated the group's downfall. In this case, Japan created laws against Aum Shinrikyo and conducted law enforcement operations against the group until it splintered. Enactment of End Plan was the Precipitant to Dissolution for one group. In this case, Heaven's Gate began its plan for suicide without an outside triggering event and executed the plan until the group dissolved. Lastly, Death of Key Leader was the Precipitant to Dissolution for one group. In this case, authorities killed Zaraqawi and AQI began a slow downfall that eventually resulted in its splintering.

End of Group

The most frequently occurring End of Group for the apocalyptic groups examined in this article was Total Dissolution (five groups). As such, the groups whose End of Group was Total Dissolution experienced a complete termination of the group. In effect, the Precipitant to Dissolution led to the end of these groups. Splintering was the End of Group for two groups, which means that remnants of the group remained after the Precipitant to Dissolution and eventually went to other groups. Lastly, the End of Group for one group was Drain of Members. This End of Group is the slow attrition of members until the group effectively dissolved. In this case, Solar Temple became violent and enacted its suicidal mission. However, the group dissolved in waves over the course of three years as members continued to commit suicide consistent with the group's plan.

PATTERNS

One pattern borne out of the data was that apocalyptic groups are sensitive to Psychological Affront and may act violently in response to it. Half of the apocalyptic groups examined in this study precipitated to mass violence by Psychological Affront. The result of this can be significant as the average number of deaths that occurred because of this type of triggering event was 44.5. The targets of this type of violence were within and outside of the groups. Evidence of Psychological Affront (for

example, leader loss of credibility, defectors) may serve as an indicator of potential catastrophic effects.

Another pattern displayed was that most of the apocalyptic groups examined in this article (five groups) had their first mass violence episode after their first decade of existence. In a sense, these groups seem to operate according to the injunction “when the time is right” apocalyptic activity will take place. For many groups, the disorganizing effects of a Psychological Affront may have fed into the self-referencing tendencies of the group and its leader leaving them with the sense that “the time has come.” It is also likely that apocalyptic groups become more vulnerable to Psychological Affront over the course of time as their prophecies do not come true, the fallibility of the leader and group become more apparent, and as people begin to experience a change in mind about the group. Indeed, the psychosocial crises that tend to propel people toward cults may well resolve after a decade, which leaves people interested in developing a life outside of the group. This may result in a desire to defect, which has been a major element of Psychological Affront. Over half of the groups (five groups) precipitated to dissolution by some confrontation, either psychological or armed.

Notable differences existed when comparing the apocalyptic groups with a terrorist and insurgent orientation (Aum Shinrikyo, AQL, and Soldiers of Heaven) with traditional cult apocalyptic groups (People’s Temple, Branch Davidians, Solar Temple, Heaven’s Gate, and Movement Restoration). Though the average number of years both types of groups remained in existence was close (13.3 for terrorist-oriented groups and 16.2 for traditional groups), a notable difference existed in the time it took the groups to engage in mass violence. The terrorist groups averaged their first mass violence attack after 7.6 years, while the traditional cult groups averaged their first attacks after 15.6 years. There was no clear distinguishing precipitant to mass violence for the terrorist groups. This contrasted with a clear precipitant to mass violence for the traditional groups, which was Psychological Affront.

The type of violence from the terrorist groups was murder, while the type of violence from the traditional groups was murder-suicide. Interestingly, the average Total Deaths from the first episode of mass violence for the terrorist groups (11) was much less than the average for the traditional groups (50). There was no clear Precipitant to Dissolution for the terrorist groups, while Psychological Affront was the common Precipitant to Dissolution for the traditional groups. Two out of the three terrorist groups’ end was Splintering, while four out of the five traditional groups’

end was Total Dissolution. Table 3 displays a comparison between terrorist orientation and traditional orientation.

Table 3. Comparison of Average Variables by Orientation.

CASE	YEARS EXISTING	YEARS TO VIOLENCE	VIOLENCE PRECIPITANT	VIOLENT ACTION	FIRST MASS DEATH	PRECIPITANT DISSOLUTION	END OF GROUP
Terrorist Apocalyptic	13.3	7.6	Psych; End Plan; Armed	Murder	11	Legal; Death LDR; Armed	Splinter
Traditional Apocalyptic	16.2	15.6	Psychological Affront	Murder-Suicide	50	Psychological Affront	Total Dissolution

Source: Author.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TERRORIST AND TRADITIONAL GROUPS

Despite notable differences between the apocalyptic groups with a terrorist orientation and those with a traditional orientation, several similarities between the orientations existed. Of the two different orientations, Branch Davidians and Soldiers of Heaven have the closest resemblance to each other. The two groups had a Years Existing that matched their Years to Violence, both had a Violence Precipitant of Armed Confrontation, both had a Precipitant to Dissolution of Armed Confrontation, and both had an End of Group of Total Dissolution. Moreover, each group had a devoutly religious framework (one Islamic and one Christian) with a leader who made messianic claims. Despite these similarities, the groups' orientations were vastly different as Soldiers of Heaven planned offensive terrorist activities within the context of the Iraq insurgency, while Branch Davidians maintained a defensive posture in the United States.

Other similarities between the orientations existed too. Al Qaeda in Iraq and Heaven's Gate shared the same Violence Precipitant of Enactment of End Plan, and in fact, were the only groups to have that as a precipitant. This is especially notable considering that AQI was the most terroristic of the groups and Heaven's Gate was inwardly focused and appeared to be the least coercive of the groups. Both groups appeared to execute their mission absent any noticeable precipitant. Another similarity between the orientations was evident between Aum Shinrikyo and the traditional groups in that Aum Shinrikyo had a Violence Precipitant of Psychological Affront, as did the traditional groups. These similarities suggest that

despite real differences between the apocalyptic group orientations, similar vulnerabilities may exist.

CONCLUSION

One hypothesis to emerge from this study is that traditional apocalyptic groups become violent at the end of ten years. Traditional apocalyptic groups seem to become more vulnerable to a perceived affront to the group's integrity or to the leader's integrity around this time. As such, routine questioning of a leader or the fostering of defections from the group may precipitate catastrophic effects after ten years. An informed diplomacy may be useful if law enforcement wants to investigate an apocalyptic group after this period. Diplomacy in this manner may entail having a credible intermediary foster a connection with the group in a way that does not stimulate the group's psychological vulnerabilities. This may prevent a cascade of events that can result in mass murder-suicide if the group perceives an imminent threat.

Another hypothesis to emerge from this study is the best time to intervene before a terrorist apocalyptic group attempts a catastrophic attack may be before the group's seventh year. There is no clear precipitant to a terrorist apocalyptic group's mass violent attack. The three terrorist apocalyptic groups examined in this study all had independent precipitating events before they committed mass violence. Similarly, this study found no recurring precipitants to terrorist apocalyptic group dissolution. There was, however, consistency in the way apocalyptic terrorist groups ended—splintering. Therefore, attempts to interdict a terrorist apocalyptic group may result in splintering of its members. The finding that apocalyptic terrorist groups end by splintering is consistent with the findings of Seth Jones and Martin Libicki who showed that the most common way religious terrorist groups (of which apocalyptic terrorist groups are a subset) dissolve is by splintering.⁴⁸

One can surmise that apocalyptic terrorist groups differed from apocalyptic cults on many of the variables examined in this study because of the difference in the groups' orientations. Apocalyptic terrorist groups have a different mission than apocalyptic cults, which helps explain some of the group differences. Apocalyptic terrorist groups will seek mass violence as an influence tactic that is not necessarily an indication of its apocalyptic agenda being set in motion. For example, many of AQI's attacks were in furtherance of the Iraq insurgency and not meant to instigate an apocalyptic confrontation, and Aum Shinrikyo disassociated

some of its attacks from its larger apocalyptic agenda. This contrasts with apocalyptic cults, where the precipitating event to their first mass violence episode often resulted in catastrophic effects.

The dissimilarity in missions may result in a heterogeneous composition of group members in apocalyptic terrorist groups when compared to apocalyptic cults. Apocalyptic terrorist groups likely have a core of true believers who operate according to the group's apocalyptic vision. However, it is possible that there are terrorist free riders who may be less devoted to an apocalyptic vision and more interested in a terrorist and insurgent agenda. Terrorist free riders will probably be less likely to see provocations as an apocalyptic sign and they will likely engage in terrorist actions that are disassociated from the group's apocalyptic vision. This heterogeneity of group composition shows in AQI, which had an apocalyptic core but that recruited and employed secular terrorists.

The different group composition may also help explain the notable differences in vulnerability to Psychological Affront between apocalyptic terrorist groups and apocalyptic cults. The high vulnerability to Psychological Affront seen in apocalyptic cults is likely a function of the groups' dependence on the charismatic leader and the perceived omnipotence of the group. The closed society embraced by apocalyptic cults leaves its members extremely dependent on the leader and the group. Affronts sufficient to pierce through the distorted view held of the leader and the group may disrupt the group homeostasis and precipitate a crisis from within.

Future research of apocalyptic groups should examine the prevalence of apocalyptic followers within the ranks of traditional religious terrorist groups. Religious terrorist groups are not necessarily apocalyptic, but it may be possible that traditional religious terrorist groups host several followers who hold apocalyptic beliefs consistent with the groups examined in this article. For example, how many followers does a Shia terrorist group, such as Hezbollah, have that subscribe to the type of apocalyptic beliefs held by the Shiite apocalyptic terrorist group Soldiers of Heaven? Similarly, are there apocalyptic elements within al-Qaeda and its affiliates that subscribe to Sunni apocalyptic beliefs as Zarqawi did with AQI? Sizeable numbers of apocalyptic followers in these conventional religious terrorist groups could be ready to see events as apocalyptic signs, the herald of which might steer their actions away from their field commanders' directions and toward fulfilling an apocalyptic agenda. Zarqawi and AQI often pursued their own agenda in this manner.

Another area of future research should be on the apocalyptic group's charismatic leader. Questions to examine in the future are as follows: Do charismatic leaders lose confidence in themselves as the apocalyptic group progresses? Do charismatic leaders experience some form of mental illness or addiction as the group progresses that make them susceptible to catastrophic action? Is there a relationship between the number of unfulfilled prophecies made by apocalyptic charismatic leaders and the time it takes the group to dissolve? Answers to these questions might help the security community better gauge their approach to apocalyptic groups.

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