CHAPTER 31

JAPAN AND AUM SHINRIKYO

James M. Smith

The case of Aum Shinrikyo ("Supreme Truth," referred to generally here as Aum), a Japanese "new religion" and cult that also embraced and practiced chemical and biological terrorism, and of the restrained and delayed Japanese government response, provides significant lessons for those seeking to better understand and respond to terrorism—domestic, religion-based terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) terrorism. While Aum has never risen to the level of any realistic threat to Japanese governmental order or national survival, it did cause a notable level of mass injury and disruption, and it did in fact employ—with little or limited effect in most cases—both biological and chemical weapons as its tactic of choice. The Aum case also demonstrates the utility to terrorism of "sanctuary under national law," and of the acquisition of chemical and biological materials and production equipment under the sanctuary of legitimate business operations. And this case raises issues of—and consequences from—governmental restraint and the persistent challenge of balancing civil liberties and national security. Finally, as described in this chapter, the case of Aum Shinrikyo also illustrates the utility of a culturally based analytical framework in examining terrorist groups and political violence, terrorist decisions and actions regarding WMD acquisition and use, and government response options, and constraints.

This chapter first examines Aum Shinrikyo within the specific context of post-World War II Japan. It does so from a strategic, culturally based analytical framework tailored to the WMD acquisition and use decisions and actions of violent nonstate actors. It then addresses the Japanese government's decisions and actions in response to Aum and its terrorist attacks from a similar cultural lens tailored to Japan. Finally, it suggests lessons learned from this case and its cultural analysis specifically for Japan and Aum, and for WMD terrorism in general. It begins by setting Aum and

its resort to WMD terrorism firmly within the context of modern Japanese history and culture.

AUM SHINRIKYO

This chapter applies a tailored, strategic, culturally based framework in analyzing Aum Shinrikyo and its employment of WMD terrorism.[1] It begins with an examination of Aum as both a new religion and political/economic entity employing violence to further its distinct agenda. The strategic analysis of its internal cult and terrorist core provides insight into the identity and belief structure of the group, its rationale for resorting to political violence, and its perspective on the legitimacy and optimal utility of WMD terrorism. This analysis thus provides the foundation for examining the group's organizational, human, technical, and operational dynamics, and its ultimate employment of terror using WMD.

Aum Roots in Japanese History and Culture

Aum Shinrikyo as a religion, cult, and terrorist group, and the Japanese governmental responses to its activities and attacks, are all solidly rooted in distinct elements of Japanese tradition as affected by World War II, its climax, and aftermath. The Japanese responses to Western technological superiority—particularly military technologies—as they played into and across the War, and also the realities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and of the vast changes in Japanese society following the War, combined to create the context within which Aum grew and operated.

Modern Japanese attempts to remain insolated from Western influence were dashed with the forced "opening" at the hands of armed Western fleets, but Japan did manage to maintain a level of insulation from Western domination. The major impact and legacy from the opening was not the supremacy of Western values, but was primarily a recognition of Western technological superiority and military might derived from technology. The Japanese reaction then was to adopt and adapt selected military technologies while maintaining the traditional Japanese system and values.

This technology was applied in the military campaigns of World War II with mixed success. One noteworthy outcome often undervalued or even overlooked in the West is the Japanese preeminence in Asia throughout the war, which is a source of quiet pride to the Japanese and a source of continuing animosity among those whom the Japanese invaded. Technology was the vehicle to regional superiority and is seen as the key to strength for many Japanese to this day. Only the United States' sustained industrial capacity and its atomic technology could overcome Japanese technology and strength. And even the atomic bomb that caused so much

death and destruction in Japan is sometimes viewed with respect beneath outward fears.

The period following the war was pivotal in forming today's Japan, with its many strengths but also its weaknesses, from which societal dislocation and terrorism have found root. Japan literally rose from the atomic ashes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and also from the fire bomb ashes of the raids on Tokyo and elsewhere. More was destroyed than the physical cities. Much of the Japanese tradition was seen as having precipitated militarism, and the combined impact of both Japanese-initiated changes and those imposed by the Western occupation authorities was to create a very different Japan. The extent and depth of the changes in Japanese society—from urbanization and industrialization to shifting family patterns and demographics—are chronicled elsewhere;[2] however, the net effect as relevant to this discussion has been termed "psychohistorical dislocation,"[3] where "the disaster of defeat . . . discredited all traditional authorities and values."[4] The results included a loss of confidence in traditional authorities, a generational stratification, new and stovepiped hierarchies around school and job, and a fractured society.

Japan had traditionally been organized according to a "vertical principle" that ordered all behaviors and relationships and was based in the core family group.[5] With the destruction of so much of the social and economic infrastructure due to the war, the progression of vertical structures for the new, urban, industrial Japan soon became family only for youth, followed by educational institution for young adults, and employer after graduation. When isolated from family and village within the new urban environment, the company becomes the "whole social existence of a person, and has authority over all aspects of his life."[6] So the progression of gaining entry into the "right" university as a stepping stone to employment with the "right" company became absolutely central to the young person's entire future. Social status was dependent on "making" this series of "gates," and failure at any level would leave the individual lost and adrift with no anchoring identity or structure. The "vertical principle" dictated societal structure and dynamics.

In such a vertically ordered society, the individual takes his identity from an institutional unit (family/school/company). That institutional identity subjugates individualism and becomes the "whole social existence of a person, and has authority over all aspects of his life."[7] The individual, "completely enveloped" within the group, attaches to a single loyalty—substantive and emotional—and displays very little individualism or autonomy. Group membership is the sole source of status and prestige. So even if you are at the bottom of the group hierarchy, the status derived from group membership places you above all outsiders. The social order is anchored in the group; a collective "us" versus all external "thems."

Within the group there is a small functional, superior core with a tiered hierarchy for all others. Across the tiers of this rigid, internal stratification there is a single, shared group loyalty. A top-down consensus is forged, and all agree and act accordingly. The alternative is forced conformity or expulsion and loss of all identity. When the group consensus is challenged from the outside, the "us/them" relationship becomes aggravated, the already extreme group loyalty is enhanced, and outsiders cease to be considered even human. Individual identity, perspective, and loyalty are then all directed to (and flow from) the in-group, and all out-groups and individuals are ignored or treated with hostility, sometimes extreme. This "localism" pervades all fields of activity, and cross-group communication—let alone cooperation—is supremely difficult.

Again, this vertical society had been originally based on the family unit within the village but post-war Japan saw vast disruption and change. The emerging pattern was focused on the concurrent increase in urbanization, as the country rebuilt its physical and economic infrastructure, but with little popular confidence in the future or expectation that the discredited organs of government could steer a productive course. As the economy began to rebound, centered on urban enterprise and technological sectors, confidence and hope shifted from family and government to industry and to education, which became the pathway into the main technical economic sectors. These sectors—technical industry and educational institutions—became themselves fairly closed and rigid stovepipes, with difficult standards set for entry and advancement. So, Japanese society was divided on several planes: generational; urban/rural; education level and focus, even specific school attended; and industrial sector, specific industry and individual company—all were delineated externally and stratified internally due to "deep social and intellectual cleavages."[8]

Japanese economic success accelerated during the 1970s, but even then Japan was left in what has been described as a "spiritual void."[9] Japan's economic success had failed to bring it wide international respect or power in the world. Japan remained in the shadow of the United States, sometimes seen as an American "puppet," and subject to being drawn into United States conflicts—including nuclear conflicts. Doubts about the present course and its uncharted, uncertain future cut deep, and this was an overlay atop the disruption of urban life and corporate technical hierarchy. The compounding pressure-cooker environment of school entry exams to get into the right school, educational success to be able to be hired by the right company, and workplace success along with the strict internal etiquette, hierarchy, and demands on the "salaryman" all created extreme pressure with little outlet for the new urbanite. This void began to be filled by "new religions," often eclectic blends of traditional religions adapted to the new environment that became a mainstay of

Japanese life. These religions received a second boost from the economic downturn of the 1980s, when even the economic anchor failed to provide stability.

Unease about the future and about Japanese national identity, compounded by a lack of trust in or clear identification with national leaders, created a quest for moral and societal vision that these new religions sought to fill. According to Mark Juergensmeyer, they "spoke to the needs of people to find certainty and a framework for understanding the unseen forces in the world around them."[10] Aum Shinrikyo emerged in this second 1980s wave of new religions in Japan.

Aum Identity, Structure, and Belief System

Aum was at its core one of several Japanese "new religions," an inclusive blending of elements of traditional Eastern religions (in this case Buddhism, Taoism, Hindu) adapted to modern themes and societal dynamics (for Aum, mixing in some aspects of the Christian book of "Revelations" and American pop cultural new age elements). The resulting mix promised both enlightenment and empowerment and proved attractive to many disaffected Japanese youth, including many educated, technically competent young people. But Aum was not simply another of the many new religions in Japan. At the head of it all was a charismatic guru, within the religion was also a cult, and within the cult grew a political entity that resorted to violence and ultimately to terrorism and employing WMD.[11]

To examine Aum's identity and core beliefs relative to terrorism, one must understand its tiered structure. As a religion, Aum accepted an apocalyptic vision that society was so badly spiritually polluted and flawed that only near-total destruction could create the conditions necessary for salvation. Aum's founder and leader, Shoko Asahara, the blind guru, taught that salvation required destruction, that society's corruption was so advanced that the world would have to be destroyed to be saved, and that a coming Armageddon perpetrated by United States' employment of nuclear weapons would initiate that destruction. Aum filed for official recognition as a religious entity and was granted that official status under the "Religious Corporations Law" in August 1989. While Aum the religion claimed tens of thousands of adherents, its inner core membership consisted of approximately 1,400 "renunciants" who surrendered all of their possessions, outside contact, and identity—even their name—to move into one of approximately 30 communes in Japan. These closed societies offered both the salvation of current living removed from the flawed values of the outside world, and also promised that these inner core members would survive and arise from the destruction of the coming Armageddon to reestablish a new society in Aum's image. These communal adherents formed what is described here as Aum the cult (see Table 31.1).[12]

Table 31.1 The Multiple Faces of Aum Shinrikyo

New Religion	– Thousands to Tens of Thousands of Adherents – Official status under "Religious Corporations Law" from 1989
Cult	– Residential Compounds (1,400 "Renunciants" at 30 Compounds) – Business Enterprises (37 Companies/300 Scientists) – Political Party (25 Candidates Ran for Diet) – Shadow Government (24 Distinct Branches)
Terrorist Organization	– 115 Indicted/20–30 in Core Cell

Source: Author

Aum the cult exercised primary control and provided most of the workers for Aum the corporate empire. Aum's holdings included religious item sales and combined religious and secular publishing, but it also included more purely "business" pursuits from noodle shops and restaurants to computer assembly operations, from a fitness club and baby sitting service to chemicals and pharmaceuticals, and from dating services and travel and real estate agencies to a weapons factory. "Aum Incorporated" also reached overseas with a presence, for example, in Australia, Russia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and the United States. Since Aum recruited specifically from college dropouts and college graduates who subsequently dropped out of corporate life or failed to gain entry into the most prestigious companies—semisuccessful and technically educated "losers"—they were able to operate high-technology economic concerns. These corporate enterprises made significant profits, largely tax exempt under Religious Corporations Law status, which Aum could then use to fund its entire range of activities, including WMD terrorism. The chemical companies also gave cover and legitimacy to obtaining equipment and precursors used for weapons manufacturing,[13] as well as for the manufacturing and sale of illicit drugs that brought in even more profits. Besides technical cover, it is estimated that by 1995 Aum had amassed wealth from these activities in the amount of $1 billion (US).[14]

Aum also formed a short-lived political party that put forward 25 candidates for election to the Diet, the Japanese parliament, in 1990. All of these candidates, including guru Asahara, went down to swift defeat. Also on the political side, Aum eventually formed a "shadow government" made up of 24 ministries and agencies to be ready to step in and assume government functions at the time of the coming Armageddon. This structure has been variously reported as mirroring the contemporary Japanese government or as reflecting the fascist government of World War II. The seemingly conflicting descriptions may result from its incorporation of both the executive governmental functions and parts of the imperial structure

surrounding the Emperor. In essence, there was an imperial structure for Asahara and his family, and there was an executive structure manned by those inner sanctum members of the highest three levels of the seven-tier religious hierarchy of Aum's renunciant followers. The central members of the core Aum decision and action structure, including the terrorist core members, are also seen on the list of "ministers."[15]

Aum's inner core's embrace of violence and ultimate resort to WMD terror is best understood by examining the turning point year of 1990. Asahara had earlier embraced an apocalyptic vision, with Japan destroyed in the coming nuclear fire, but (as opposed to 1945) now arising from the ashes spiritually reborn (with Aum as its spiritual savior). In early 1990, both with newly won official religion status and in the wake of its overwhelming and humiliating electoral defeat (and bearing the brunt of unflattering press caricatures), Asahara began to preach a religion of heightened violence linked to the coming end of the millennium. Influences on this shift also included the build-up to and conduct of the Gulf War, where Asahara identified with Saddam Hussein as a "victim" of United States' aggression. He also saw the futility of seeking to stand up to the U.S. military superiority, the conventional military supremacy that might make the predicted nuclear destruction avoidable (coupled with the end of the Cold War also lowering the likelihood of nuclear exchange). And he saw the respect—even fear—shown by the U.S. military of the possibility of Iraqi chemical or biological weapons employment. Asahara now shifted to put emphasis on hastening and ensuring Armageddon, and also shifted to obtaining and using his own WMD weapons. He undertook a retreat into the southern islands to announce and recast his vision, and simultaneously ordered the initial biological weapons test back on the main Japanese island. Aum the terrorist core was launched in the guru's vision. As Lifton observes, "Asahara's shifting predictions and lurid descriptions of the sequence of events by which the world would end became Aum's controlling narrative, the story that subsumed all else and into which every struggle had to fit."[16]

Against this backdrop, Aum had also—concurrently with gaining official religion status in late 1989—come under attack from families and their lawyers complaining of the cult's aggressive recruitment and virtual "kidnapping" of renunciants into its isolated compounds. It was also criticized for some of its property and land acquisition practices, and the net effect was to perceive these complaints as threatening its recognition under the Religious Corporations Law. Aum reacted by murdering the primary lawyer involved in the challenge (Tsutsumi Sakamoto) and his family. Aum had been (and continued to be) strident and violent in its internal "control and discipline" of its members (police reports subsequently held that Aum had killed 33 of its own members as well as several outside challengers), and now it also turned to attack all significant external

challenges. A relatively nonchallenging police raid on one compound in 1990 over a land dispute compounded the other 1990 influences, and Aum turned its violence both at its challengers and in pursuit of its religious beliefs.

This reaction to external challenges combined with the embrace of "endism" (actively seeking Armageddon) to create a self-sustaining cycle: endism justified, even drove, extremism; extremism alienated some members; dealing with potential and actual dropouts brought on "persecution;" persecution and criticism fueled the Armageddon prophecy while underscoring and heightening endism. As Lifton reports, to Asahara a direct linkage was cemented between the "end of the self"—challenges to Aum and its religion status—and to the "end of the world" as central to the religious core; thus, "Weapons-centered destruction of the defiled world had to be achieved for the survival of that self."[17] Aum embarked upon an active biological and chemical weapons program (and unsuccessfully sought nuclear weapons) to ensure its survival to and through the "end of the world." Aum's resulting violent action, then, developed in three phases: retribution and enforcement against external critics and internal turncoats; WMD terrorism to force the predicted Armageddon; and WMD terrorism against external challenges that rose to threaten the continued health and existence of Aum the cult and its core leadership.

Aum Operations and WMD[18]

Aum carried out several "disciplinary" operations—including murder—against defectors or others that defied the central authority of Asahara or otherwise incurred his wrath. These acts of non-WMD control and retribution are believed to have begun with the murder of cult member Shuji Taguchi in February 1989, proceeded to the brutal killing of lawyer Sakamoto and his family in November 1989, and continued on to the pivotal February 1995 Tokyo kidnapping and murder of Kiyoshi Kariya, brother of an escaped cult member.[19]

To detail one example of an act of political violence in this category, Aum's first major violent action outside of the cult was the murder of the Sakamoto family in Yokohama in November 1989. Sakamoto was a lawyer who was calling on families of Aum renunciants to bring suit over the cult's "fraudulent message," aggressive recruitment, harsh treatment, and removal of all personal wealth and property from its inner members. Sakamoto was seen as a threat to the official religion status and even existence of Aum, and thus to its ability to fulfill its religious destiny. The threat must be removed, its leaders felt, and such opposition deterred from happening again. Asahara dispatched a team to meet Sakamoto at the commuter train station on his way home, kidnap him, and kill him. In their first illustration of their "keystone cops" ineptitude (as opposed to

hardened terrorists), the Aum team failed to realize that they were standing on the platform on a national holiday, and Sakamoto was not working or commuting that day. They were forced to invade the Sakamoto home in the middle of the night and kill the entire family. Press and some local police following of this case would dog Aum across the next several years until their eventual fall.

Most notably, the group also carried out at least 14 WMD operations across the 6-year period 1990–1995.[20] The most significant of these WMD operations are summarized in Table 31.2 (Biological Agent Attacks) and Table 31.3 (Chemical Agent Attacks). Note that Aum began with an active bio-weapons program. However, its use of bio-weapons was limited by repeated failure to achieve successful effects with those weapons. As a result, the focus fell upon more tactical chemical weapons, and as the group succeeded in producing sarin, that chemical became the weapon of choice.[21]

Aum's use of biological weapons came primarily early in the cult's efforts to facilitate Armageddon, and these attacks were attempts to both validate the technology and perfect the employment of the agents. The initial test in April 1990, this of botulinus toxin sprayed from vehicles, was timed to coincide with Aum's core leadership retreat on Ishigaki Island, during which they sought to articulate the new and more strident religious doctrine of hastening Armageddon. Reports indicate that these vehicles traveled around the Japanese Diet (to which Aum had just failed in their attempt to be elected), U.S. military installations in the Tokyo vicinity, and even out to Narita airport. However, the cult failed in its attempt to disperse the bacillus in lethal form.

Similarly, Aum had not solved its dispersal problems 3 years later when it again sought to spray botulinus from vehicles in Tokyo, this time around the Imperial Palace in conjunction with the visits from many foreign dignitaries to attend the Crown Prince's royal wedding. Even a switch a few weeks later to anthrax dispensed from blowers on the roof of an Aum-owned building in Tokyo was no more successful. Aum then largely abandoned active attempts at bio-terrorism until its again-unsuccessful use, this time in the form of botulinus released in the Tokyo subway's Kasumigaseki Station, in March 1995, in an attempt to save the cult just days before its Tokyo subway sarin attack centered on the same station.

With the failures across 1993 in its use of bio-weapons to achieve fulfillment of its Armageddon narrative, and faced with a range of growing popular and press criticisms and legal challenges, Aum embarked on a chemical weapons program centered on sarin. Sarin became the central element of Aum's most notorious and dangerous WMD terrorism. Indeed, Lifton notes that "Aum's embrace of sarin had to do, at first, with the cult's success in producing it as a weapon. Once established, however, sarin became an organizing principle for Asahara's megalomania, for Aum's rhetoric of persecution, and ultimately for its Armageddon project."[22]

Table 31.2 Aum Shinrikyo and Major Biological Agent Attacks[27]

Date	Agent(s)	Location(s)	Victim(s)	Rationale	Results
April 1990	Botulinus Toxin	Tokyo Area	Japanese Diet; U.S. military installations at Yokohama and Yokosuka; Narita airport	Agent/System Test; Force Armageddon	Failed: Dispersal problems
June 9, 1993	Botulinus Toxin	Tokyo	Imperial Wedding	Force Armageddon	Failed: Dispersal problems
Late June 1993	Anthrax	Tokyo	Downtown Tokyo	Force Armageddon	Failed: Agent, dispersal problems
March 15, 1995	Botulinus Toxin	Tokyo	Kasumigaseki subway station	Retribution/Survival	Failed: Agent problems

Source: Author

Table 31.3 Aum Shinrikyo and Major Chemical Agent Attacks[28]

Date	Agent(s)	Location(s)	Victim(s)	Rationale	Results
Spring 1994	Sarin	Tokyo	Soka Gakkai Leader	Agent/System Test; Retribution	Failed: Dispersal problems
June 27, 1994	Sarin	Matsumoto Village	Three judges	Retribution/Survival	Failed: Seven dead, over 200 affected; wind blew away from judges
March 20, 1995	Sarin	Tokyo	Subway system	Preemption/Survival	Failed (?): 12 dead, over 5,500 affected
May 5, 1995	Hydrogen Cyanide	Tokyo	Subway system	Retribution/Survival	Failed: Dispersal problems

Source: Author

As Aum succeeded in producing sarin in weaponized form, its first attempt to disperse sarin in gas form (through heating) was targeted at an auditorium in which the leader of a rival new religion, Soka Gakkai, was speaking. Heating the liquid sarin to produce gas failed, and the truck carrying the Aum team caught fire, ending that test. Aum switched to heavy, refrigerator trucks, but still did not find total success in employment of sarin gas.

In June 1994 Aum sent its sarin trucks to Matsumoto Village, in the center of Honshu, to attack the courthouse where three district court judges were hearing a property challenge involving Aum land. The plan was to spray sarin gas into the courthouse and kill the principals in the case. The new, heavy trucks may have been better vehicles for producing sarin gas, but they were also very slow, and they arrived at Matsumoto after court had adjourned for the day. The target was switched to the neighborhood compound where the judges lived. This time the winds did not cooperate, and the judges' homes were spared attack. However, 7 were killed and over 200 made ill by the sarin.

Aum's signature sarin attack was on the central Tokyo subway system on March 20, 1995, and involved five nearly simultaneous sarin releases on four separate rail lines, all converging on the Kasumigaseki Station. By early 1995 the weight of evidence against Aum was becoming so great as to overcome cultural and structural barriers that affected the Japanese police and government response (as addressed in the following section of this chapter). Multiple police raids were planned on Aum compounds for March 19–21, and one was actually carried out on March 19. Aum was tipped off about these raids, and the cult first staged a failed botulinus attack, attempting to use briefcase dispersal on Kasumigaseki Station on March 15. Kasumigaseki Station serves the Tokyo district that houses the headquarters of the Japanese National Police Agency and Ministry of Justice, as well as several other government agencies. With the raids imminent and the botulinus attack having failed, Aum hastily dispatched five teams to dispense sarin by simply using sharpened umbrella tips to release liquid sarin contained in plastic bags. The plan was to have five trains from multiple directions converging on Kasumigaseki to bring mass death that would affect the investigation and prosecution of Aum. The primitive dispersal limited that mass effect, but still 12 died and over 5,500 people were made ill by the attack. Aum leadership was subsequently brought to justice following this attack, and the core terrorist membership removed from the religion. The religion remains today, but without the vision and resources to recreate the level of danger it once posed, and with more direct monitoring by authorities to ensure it limits its activities to more traditional religious practices.

Summary

To summarize, Aum Shinrikyo—one of Japan's second wave of new religions—operated under the Japanese vertical principle to provide a "total envelopment" of its members, becoming the single focal point of their identity. Its unique draw fell upon educated but less than totally successful youth, particularly many with technical knowledge and skills. As many of these youth were drawn into Aum's inner cult, which increasingly embraced a vision of Armageddon and societal rebirth, a few were enticed to turn their technical skills to produce biological and chemical weapons, and to assist in employing those agents and toxins both to protect Aum against official challenge and to hasten the coming Armageddon.

Aum first employed violence without the use of WMD both to control its members and to attack its active detractors. The religious narrative of violence became one with the cult itself, particularly among its core leadership, and violence produced a cycle of action, reaction, and escalated action. Aum then began to test and employ biological weapons to seek to hasten and ensure the Armageddon, but the cult was unable to successfully dispense the toxins. Aum had, after initial failure, slightly more success with sarin, which it employed in an effort to stave off challenges to its official religion status and survival.

Aum's recruitment of technically able young people and its acquisition and employment of WMD were enabled by legal protections for religions and corporate enterprises. Aum built a significant corporate structure, including chemical and pharmaceutical companies that provided access to the materials and precursors for biological and chemical terrorism, and that also provided up to $1 billion American dollars to back the effort. But even with this technical, financial, and resources base, Aum was unable to fully successfully produce and employ WMD. The problems of agent weaponization and dispersal are very real, and Aum did not quite reach the level of capability to employ its full lethal potential. Given these setbacks and the accumulation of evidence and incentive over almost 6 years, Japanese national and local authorities had sufficient opportunity and push to finally bring to bear a culturally determined and delayed response.

THE JAPANESE RESPONSE

Even though Aum succeeded in developing biological and chemical weapons, the cult never developed the operational expertise to allow it to carry out a fully successful operation, nor to provide complete cover and deniability for its acts. In fact, its operational activities should have

been challenged and stopped much earlier, given the errors made at each action and the evidence provided from those errors. But Japanese culture and the changes in Japanese society following World War II also shaped the response to Aum by both local and national officials. And even after Japan was faced with largely external violence from the terrorist group of the 1970s, the Japanese Red Army, the nation remained unprepared to face terrorist challenges.

The primary impediments to a Japanese response to Aum stemmed from the same "vertical principle" within Japanese society and culture that helped to shape Aum and enable its path to violence. Each police force and justice jurisdiction was in fact its own stovepiped vertical structure, with limited initiative at lower levels internally and little communication or contact—let alone cooperation—between agencies, jurisdictions, or levels of government. As Nakane puts it, "localism characterizes all fields of activity," rendering any crossgroup cooperation very difficult.[23]

Further, and compounding this already difficult response context, the police legacy of prewar religious repression had two compounding effects. First, the police at every level were very slow and reluctant to challenge any religious entity. For Aum and other groups with official religion status, they enjoyed a "great deal of latitude and considerable government leniency regarding their freedom of action and range of public expression."[24] This also extended to latitude to employ violence with only a much delayed and muted response. A second effect on the police response was to limit their expertise to deal with complex and technical criminal or terrorist acts. After the war, and to prevent the creation of a strong national police capability that might once again become a vehicle for centralized national control, the Japanese and American architects of postwar Japan created a decentralized system, with no central national investigation authority. This resulted in fragmented efforts at investigation of multijurisdictional activities, interjurisdictional rivalries, and little to no information sharing. Even the national body that might have brought coordinated focus on Aum and its activities, the Security Bureau of Japanese intelligence, focused on leftists not terrorism. And because of the legacy of abuse, this bureau is reported to have great reluctance to wire tap or use undercover agents. Similar deliberate weakness extended to corporate oversight, where the Japanese Ministry of Health took a hands-off approach to registration of bio-technology firms and activities, allowing mail order of dangerous organisms if the order appeared on an "official" letterhead and contained a self-statement of a legitimate purpose for the order.[25] As Kaplan and Marshal note, "The nation, in effect, had a nineteenth-century police force trying to fight a twenty-first century crime."[26] So, while Aum almost tried to get caught at virtually every step of violence, the police response was fragmented and ineffectual for several years.

As early as the Sakamoto family murder in late 1989, an Aum badge or medallion was found at the scene. At that time only the top 100 or so members of the inner core had these badges, and this might have been a red flag pointing to the cult as responsible for the crime. However, the police argued internally that this evidence might be an attempt to "get" Aum approaching the election in which Aum was running 25 candidates for parliament. The decision to even request an interview to question Aum leadership about the badge was delayed for 16 days, during which Aum manufactured many hundred more badges.

This Sakamoto case illustrates one other aspect of the Japanese delay in acting against Aum. The press pointed to Aum as primary culprit immediately upon the disappearance of the Sakamoto family. However, much of the Japanese press tends toward sensationalized stories, and for years they had a love-hate relationship with Aum. Aum made the news in many ways, and it sought to use the press for publicity and recruitment. Meanwhile, the press covered Aum, often ridiculing or criticizing Asahara and some of the group's eccentricities. So, even when the press correctly identified Aum as the culprit and published evidence of its crimes and terrorist acts, the police exhibited great reluctance to investigate based solely or primarily on press reports. Even later, when local press in the villages bordering Aum's Kamikuishiki Compound near Mount Fuji (and the site of Aum's Satyam 7 biological and chemical weapons production facility) made claims of stunted crops and dead animals resulting from a sarin leak at the compound, the police were slow to react until prodded by further evidence and inputs. In response to these reports, Asahara reported multiple sarin attacks on the compound by United States and Japanese aircraft, but even such outrageous claims actually naming sarin as the source of the village effects failed to move the police to quick action.

In the end, it was a combination of evidence from two attacks, ironically one against a member of the press whose persistent investigation got under cult leadership's skin, that brought on police cooperation and a more effective, coordinated response. A former Yokohama press reporter and then freelance investigator with two critical books on Aum to her credit continued to press her attempts to prove Aum's responsibility for the Sakamoto family murders, and then almost 5 years after that crime was seeking to prove the link between Aum and the Matsumoto Village sarin attack. Aum gassed her home in the night with World War I-era phosgene gas, and this attack prompted the Yokohama police to finally pass on evidence of Aum's interest in sarin to the Japanese National Police Agency, which finally began a coordinated, multijurisdictional investigation. Ultimately this investigation linked the sarin used at Matsumoto Village to the sarin leaked from Satyam 7, thus linking Aum to the Matsumoto deaths.

Just after the New Year's day 1995 report of this sarin linkage on the front pages of *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the largest circulation Japanese newspaper, Aum was implicated in the kidnapping from Tokyo and murder of Kiyoshi Kariya, the brother and protector of a woman who had escaped from Aum. In this case, the rental van used in the kidnapping in Tokyo was identified and traced to Aum. Key here is that at last the Tokyo police, the nation's most capable force, was also brought to the center of the growing effort to investigate Aum. From here it was a short few weeks until the planned combined police raids precipitated Aum's Tokyo subway attack.

In sum, a decentralized and fragmented police structure within a society in which crossgroup communication and cooperation is rare and far from facilitated, provided Aum with cover—both religious and corporate—under which it carried out an escalating series of violent acts, ultimately incorporating WMD into those actions. The press was in front of the police in pointing fingers at Aum, but press sensationalism and a confrontational relationship with Aum delayed and muted the impact of their reporting. As Aum's acts and activities spanned several prefectures and thus jurisdictions, no one police force gathered sufficient evidence to overcome the legal and cultural barriers behind which Aum the religious cult and Aum Incorporated stood. It finally took courage and an accumulation of evidence to force a coordinated response to Aum. But overall, across 6 years of violence and really 2 years of repeated WMD employment, the Japanese government and police failed to act. Even after the Tokyo subway attacks, all of the deaths, arrests, and evidence accumulation, the Japanese government still stopped short of amending its broad grant of religious and corporate freedom in general, treating Aum as an aberration, but it also declined to ban Aum or withdraw its official religion status. With Asahara and the core cult/terrorist leadership in jail, Aum the religion still endures.

LESSONS LEARNED

While in many ways this case is a unique reflection of both traditional and contemporary Japanese culture and society, and the product of the unique blend that became the conjoined personality of Shoko Asahara and Aum Shinrikyo, we can still draw some general lessons to improve our ability to analyze and respond to national, religious-based, and WMD terrorism. These lessons are drawn from the potential and problems of WMD as terror weapons, the underlying political purpose of the use of violence by nominally "religious" organizations, the implications of special treatment of religious groups and seemingly legitimate businesses, and the overall utility of expanding more widely used tactical and operational

analysis tools with the addition of cultural perspectives and culture-based analysis.

Both the Potential and Problems of WMD Terrorism

The Aum case at once underscores the very real potential for WMD weapons acquisition/development and use by a national, not externally sponsored entity, and of the significant technical barriers to the successful employment of such weapons by even highly technically competent and well-resourced groups. Aum membership was attractive to well-educated, technically competent young Japanese, and thus Aum had an internal recruitment base of literally hundreds of scientists and technicians from which to draw the handful they needed for their WMD terror program. Aum also developed a significant and overt business enterprise that provided legitimate cover that allowed—within admittedly lax Japanese government regulation—the acquisition of the needed equipment, precursors, and materials for the development of biological and chemical weapons. However, even with those advantages and with the availability of technically competent personnel to be included on its operational WMD employment teams, Aum was not fully successful in dispersing its toxins and agents during any of its WMD attacks.

Aum's success in developing the weapons stands as a red flag that others will try to gain and some will likely succeed in gaining chemical and biological terror capabilities. But Aum's failure to fully succeed in weaponization and dispersal also provides a note of reality that somewhat lowers the "terror" of WMD terrorism. It must also remind us that this only means that, at this moment, we have won a brief period in which to improve our WMD controls, detection mechanisms, and response capabilities. WMD terrorism is not easy, but in all probably it is inevitable.

Political Foundations of "Religious" Terrorism

The Aum case reminds us that the "new" terrorism—religious-based terrorism—is both new and old simultaneously. Yes, self-proclaimed limits on mass, indiscriminate violence may be removed by the new narratives, opening both the possibility and desirability of WMD employment by the "new" generation of terrorists. But this new terrorism retains an underlying foundation of political purpose, in Aum's case an explicit underlying political structure closely linked to its religious hierarchy and the ultimate political objectives behind its resort to violence. Terrorism is at base political violence in one of its many guises and incarnations; indirect violence applied for psychological effect toward political goals whether toward fulfilling an ideologically or a religiously defined destiny. And responding to religious-based terrorism must put emphasis on that

political foundation and the terrorist actions, ultimately forcing questions about the balance of civil/religious liberty and security. These questions are not easy or comfortable for any society, and the answers are far from preordained regardless of the type or level of violence. However, those questions cannot be ignored without consequences.

Essential Sanctuary Can Be Anchored in Law and/or Business Status

The Aum case underscores that one of those consequences of deferring or avoiding addressing the religious-based terrorism questions is the creation of "sanctuary under the law" and/or "sanctuary of legitimate business." Sanctuary has long been established as a central goal of and aid to transborder and transnational groups. This sanctuary has come in the form of borders, "ungoverned" remote regions, and today even "ungoverned" urban sectors. Aum illustrates how emphasizing the "religion" dimension of a religious-based terrorist group can lead to significant legal protections that provide "sanctuary" for the organization's operations, as well as cause delays and even form barriers to government and police response. Similarly, economic freedom can be used by a terrorist group to establish the cover for dual-use enterprises (those using processes and materials that have both legitimate and nefarious purposes). When economic regulation is too lax, or especially when a trend toward loose regulation is heightened by a hands-off approach to religion-affiliated businesses, a form of economic sanctuary results. As chemical and biological weapons are both associated with the dual-use problem, this sanctuary is particularly relevant to WMD terrorism. Sanctuary is indeed a critical element to insurgents and terrorists, and it can come from internal sources.

Cultural Determinism of Both Terrorism and the Response

There are several strengths to a strategic, culturally focused perspective for terrorism analysis. Terrorism is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon and it is best addressed through multiple levels of analysis and the application of multiple lenses. The cultural, strategic lens expands the focus well beyond simply the weapons, the victims, and the acts. It allows full attention to the rationale and objectives behind the acts, and it links the ultimate targets to the tactical victims. Significantly, it also delves into the terrorist identity and belief structure, providing a hint of their "rationality" behind what often appears to us as totally non-rational decisions and actions. So while not ignoring the important *what*, *who*, *when*, and *where* questions and answers of operational analysis, it also provides the fundamental *why*, the essential second-order *who*, and the ever-critical *so what* of a strategic focus. Only understanding all of these dimensions of terrorism will allow a full set of tailored response actions and effects. It forms a

valuable additional arrow in the quiver of those seeking to respond to and ultimately defeat terrorism, and no weapon can be ignored in that fight.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The views expressed in this case study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Air Force, the Department of the Army, The Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

NOTES

1. The Defense Threat Reduction Agency's Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (DTRA/ASCO) has sponsored a project across 2005 and 2006 to advance the academic study of strategic culture and to demonstrate the utility of cultural analysis and intelligence to examine state and "rogue" state weapons of mass destruction acquisition and use decisions and actions. This case author's USAF Institute for National Security Studies has participated in the project workshops, and the author contributed a template extending the project focus to violent nonstate actors (VNSAs) and WMD terrorism. The discussion and framework development and application in this section is based on that work. See James M. Smith, "Strategic Culture, VNSAs, and WMD," paper presented at DTRA/Utah State University Comparative Strategic Cultures III Workshop, Park City, UT, May 3–5, 2006.

2. For just three such classic studies that were reviewed for this chapter see R. P. Dore, *City Life in Japan: A Study of a Tokyo Ward* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967); Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970); and Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: The Story of a Nation*, revised ed. (New York: Knopf, 1974).

3. Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999) 236.

4. Reischauer: p. 249.

5. This section is based on the analysis presented in Nakane.

6. Nakane: p. 3.

7. Nakane: p. 3.

8. Reischauer: p. 262.

9. Reischauer: p. 316.

10. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000) 116. See Chapter 6, "Armageddon in a Tokyo Subway," for details about Aum the new religion.

11. This analysis is focusing on broad aspects of culture and their shaping influence on the organizational, operational, and behavioral dynamics of Aum's practice of WMD terrorism and concurrent cultural shaping effects on the Japanese response. For equally important detail, not included here, and psychological analysis of cult guru Shoko Asahara and of Aum the cult see Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It;* for equally important detail on Aum the religion see Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God;* and for additional detail on operational and response issues see D. W. Brackett, *Holy Terror: Armageddon in Tokyo* (New York:

Weatherhill, 1996); and David E. Kaplan and Andrew Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World* (New York: Crown, 1996).

12. For more on the power of cults to control members' behavior, please see Mark Galanter and James J. F. Forest, "Cults, Charismatic Groups and Social Systems: Understanding the Transformation of Terrorist Recruits," in *The Making of a Terrorist, Vol. 2*, ed. James J. F. Forest (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005) 51–70; and Arthur J. Deikman, "The Psychological Power of Charismatic Leaders in Cults and Terrorist Organizations," in *The Making of a Terrorist, Vol. 2*: pp. 71–83.

13. For a detailed description of the Satian 7 chemical weapons manufacturing compound, see John V. Parachini, "The Making of Aum Shinrikyo's Chemical Weapons Program," in *The Making of a Terrorist, Vol. 2*: pp. 277–295.

14. Lifton: p. 37.

15. See Brackett: pp. 103–104, for graphic depictions of the religious and shadow government hierarchies.

16. Lifton: p. 44.

17. Lifton: p. 201.

18. For more detail specifically on Aum's WMD terrorism, see James M. Smith, "Aum Shinrikyo," in *Weapons of Mass Destruction: An Encyclopedia of Worldwide Policy, Technology, and History*, eds. Eric Croddy and James Wirtz (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2005).

19. Brackett: p. 19, cites the strangulation of Taguchi as the cult's first murder.

20. Accounts and numbers vary, but the number 14 incidents appears supportable. It is offered by Lifton: p. 6.

21. See John V. Parachini, "The Making of Aum Shinrikyo's Chemical Weapons Program."

22. Lifton: p. 179.

23. Nakane: p. 131.

24. Juergensmeyer: p. 116.

25. Kaplan and Marahall: p. 56.

26. Kaplan and Marshall: p. 149.

27. Derived from Brackett, *Holy Terror*; Kaplan and Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World*; Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It*; and U.S. Congress, Senate Government Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (Minority Staff), *Global Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Case Study on the Aum Shinrikyo*, Washington, DC, October 31, 1995.

28. Derived from Brackett, *Holy Terror*; Kaplan and Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World*; Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It*; and Senate Government Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (Minority Staff), *Global Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Case Study on the Aum Shinrikyo*.