

Terror in Japan

Gavan McCormack, Meredith Box

The Red Army (1969-2001) and Aum Supreme Truth (1987-2000)

Meredith Box and Gavan McCormack

ABSTRACT: Observers of early twenty-first-century Japan commonly note economic, political, and social crisis, on the one hand, and pessimism, lethargy, or helplessness about the possibility of reform, on the other. Yet Japan's civil society was idealistic and energetic in the early postwar decades. What happened? The reform movement that captured much of the vitality of the early postwar decades was either foreclosed, as many were co-opted in the "all-for-growth" economism, consumerism, and the corporation, or crushed in successive waves of repression of dissidence as the cold war order took shape. Political parties sacrificed broad vision and ideals to narrow-interest articulation. While the mass base of the reform movement was discouraged, demoralized, and depoliticized, one minority in the late 1960s turned to violent revolution and another in the late 1980s turned inward to seek spiritual satisfaction. Both paths led to violence. This article looks at the course of the student movement between the late 1940s and the late 1970s, with particular reference to the Japan Red Army, and at the new religious movement Aum Supreme Truth in the 1980s and 1990s. Both adopted "terrorist" tactics, by almost any understanding of that term. However, they were children of their times, reflecting the same deep social, political, and moral problems

that Japan as a whole continues to face in the early twenty-first century.

Dissent, Repression, Violence, 1960s and 1980s

After 1945, democracy and a liberal-parliamentary system replaced wartime totalitarianism in Japan, but the democratic project was compromised from the outset by its context: incorporation within a U.S.-led global system. Citizens who demanded reform or insisted on the exercise of rights they believed guaranteed under the constitution found themselves marginalized. In practice, the constitution was of only secondary importance. The U.S. relationship was the key determinant of Japan's postwar sociopolitical landscape.

Movements for civil rights, for worker or trade union rights, and for local control of education were all launched as part of the process of giving life to the abstract principles of the constitution and were confronted by the bureaucratic machinery of a state set on shrinking the bounds of the legitimate. Enfeebled and intimidated, groups committed to social justice and grassroots democracy resorted to "persuasion" and "enormous pressure" to advance their agenda.¹ As their persuasion and pressure were met by further repression, they gradually resorted to violence.²

In keeping with this pattern, the student and broader civil movements of postwar Japan were constitutionally conservative. That is to say, they looked enthusiastically to the fulfillment of the pacifist and democratic ideals of the constitution, while so-called "conservatives" were committed to its overthrow. Under pressure, however, as they found themselves confronting instruments of state power bent on

repudiating what they saw as core constitutional principles, restoring bureaucratic privilege and consolidating a system oriented primarily to the service of U.S. strategic purpose, sections of the student movement resorted to violence. As the contradiction between civil movements, including students, and state power sharpened, the postwar era became marked by waves of militancy and repression. The waves peaked in 1950 and again in 1960 ½ in 1950, when students made vain attempts to resist the widespread bureaucratic interventions in the universities, implemented on orders of the Occupation authorities, and the sackings of left-wing staff,³ and in 1960, with the mass demonstrations against the renewal of the security treaty with the United States.

A new wave of such militancy began to gather force in 1963-64, when some student factions began using *gebabo* (gewalt, or violence staves) and helmets in their demonstrations. The struggles against the Japan-South Korea Normalization Treaty, which was seen as an expression of Japan's incorporation into Washington's global cold war strategy, expanded as the war in Vietnam intensified and was fought to a significant degree from Japanese bases. The appropriation of land for a new Tokyo airport at Sanrizuka (now Tokyo International Airport at Narita) occasioned fierce struggles, partly because of the belief that such an airport would constitute part of a war-oriented strategy. Apart from their adoption of a broad social agenda around such issues, students protested that universities and other public institutions were being subverted by cold war priorities. They protested also against impersonal, bureaucratic power in academic and other institutions ½ poor conditions in tertiary institutions, inadequate or dilapidated facilities, dull and unimaginative teaching, overcrowded classes, rising fees. They zigzagged in snake-dance demonstrations, fought with *gebabo*, occasionally used Molotov cocktails to bomb police posts, and occupied

symbolic spaces in cities, railway stations, and airports for brief periods.

The 1960s wave of rising student militancy peaked in the occupation of most of the country's universities, forcing the suspension of classes for a full academic year (1968-69). From their bases in one or another campus building, militant students of various factions fought both against state power, in the form of the police, and against each other, in a spiral of interfactional violence as hegemony over the campuses was contested.⁴ The level of factional violence (*uchiï½geba*) in these fierce, internal struggles over doctrine or territory was of such intensity that eighty-five people were killed and five thousand wounded between 1968 and 1988.⁵

After a year of intense confusion and growing violence in 1968-69, however, the occupations were broken; the militant ranks split as the mass of students retreated, tired and dispirited, to face prolonged court battles. When classes resumed in August 1969, the minority extremists went underground. The term *kageï½kiha* (extremist) had hitherto referred to all helmeted, masked, *gebabo*-ï½wielding students irrespective of faction or ideology. Henceforth it referred in particular to the handful of militant groups that persisted in struggle, most prominent among them being the Red Army (Sekigun).

* * *

At the end of the 1980s a very different mood prevailed. High growth and prosperity had wrought a deep transformation of values and aspirations. Faced with what seemed to be the atomization and alienation of advanced capitalist prosperity, new religions flourished offering meaning, community, and spiritual fulfillment. Aum Supreme Truth (Aum Shinrikyo) was especially attractive to the idealistic young because it seemed to represent a way out of their frustration with the pressures and values of "progress" and

"rationalism" in the world of their parents. Like their predecessors in the political sects of the 1960s, Aum's recruits and activists shared a sense of failure and closure. Their activities escalated through the early 1990s, culminating in the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway system in 1995.

Launched in 1987 as a religious organization, Aum's early practices reflected approaches and ideas familiar in Japanese "new" religions, including yoga, spiritual guidance, and the promise of "miracle" experiences. Aum was headed by Matsumoto Chizuo (b. 2 March 1955), also known as Asahara Shoko, a partially blind former acupuncturist, "quack" medicine dealer, and yoga instructor. Asahara described himself as the "one and only person who has acquired supreme truth" and he attributed to himself supernatural powers. He fit the traditional Japanese profile of founder of a new religion: volatile, aggressive, confrontational, visionary, filled with grievance and sense of mission. He visited India and Tibet in search of "the way" and was blessed by the Dalai Lama among others as a holy man.⁶ As Aum evolved, its doctrine took shape based on early, or Tantric, Buddhism and incorporating mystical, millenarian elements of Taoism, Hinduism, and Christianity. In 1991 Asahara declared himself the Christ: his books contain pictures of him on the cross, crowned with thorns.

The name "Aum" was taken from the Sanskrit word used in mantras and prayers, representing the interlocking powers of the universe (often written in English as "om"), and the attributes of the sacred Hindu trilogy of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, the gods of creation, preservation, and destruction.⁷ Aum adherents undertook rigorous spiritual training, according to a practice that tended to combine culturally "familiar" elements of the discipline and bashing of the old Imperial Army with some of the physical and spiritual hardships of Zen Buddhism. "Bad" Karma or

desire was driven off, if necessary, by savage beating. Training included prolonged meditation sessions, sometimes in confined underground spaces (for up to five days),⁸ and the search for enlightenment in the Buddhist sense of freedom, beyond Karma or desire, in a state beyond good and evil, where freedom reigned. Complete freedom was equated with subordination to the will of the Guru, who alone experienced full enlightenment. In order to share his wisdom, disciples engaged in various practices, drinking his bath water or his blood, and seeking to adjust body and mind rhythms to his by complex electronic circuitry. The line between death and salvation was a fine one, and death, in any event, was seen as liberation, to be welcomed.

Aum's ascetic practices and eclectic theology merged with an imaginative world that Japanese youth were familiar with in virtual form from computer games, manga, and TV: the world of violent, cataclysmic clashes between the warriors of good and evil. In the early 1990s, especially following the Gulf War of 1991, Asahara's prophecies of catastrophe and doom grew more vivid and obsessive. He spoke of plasma weapons that would atomize human bodies, of large mirrors suspended in space to turn the sun's rays on cities to destroy them, and of vast laser guns. Most of humanity would be wiped out, he suggested, and only the elite saved.

By the time of the March 1995 Tokyo attack, the cult had some ten thousand members, of whom about one thousand were full-time dedicated "monks," shukke, living in special communities. Most of them were in their twenties and thirties, young, ambitious, well educated; some were highly trained scientists and graduate students in physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, and electrical engineering. Mind-reading, prophecy, levitation, purity of purpose: all helped to attract them.

Both the Red Army and Aum Supreme Truth cult members were sensitive to the deep social, political, and moral problems produced by the narrowly focused, conservative Japanese state that was being constructed by bureaucrats and their American mentors. Both groups believed that their recourse to systematic, coercive intimidation (commonly described as "terror" by the Japanese government and the Japanese and international media) was rendered legitimate by their purity of purpose.⁹ They drew on the political ideals and aspirations of their generation but diverted and dissipated them in directions that now seem destructive or even crazy. Frozen out of society as "other," their critical imagination and organizational capacity failed them, and in both cases the most radical, apparently, of movements produced at their center characteristic features of the society they rejected. Instead of radical alternatives, they offered merely a distorted, reverse image of the narrowly focused, conservative Japanese state.

Sekigun ½ Red Army (1969-2001)

The Red Army Faction (Sekigun-ha), formed by militant students in Tokyo in August 1969, analyzed the campus occupations, the battles, the mass arrests, the preparation for resumption of classes, the heightened repression and surveillance and concluded that it amounted only to a temporary reversal. The revolutionary wave, they decided, was not receding but about to break. There was little evidence to support such a proposition, but the alternative was to concede that their original analysis had been flawed. Their mission became to precipitate the mass upheaval that would trigger a world transformation. Proclaiming themselves the vanguard of global revolution, they declared war on the bourgeoisie, set about bombings and bank robberies, and sought to forge links with radical and revolutionary groups around the world, a strategy that became essential for survival as police pressure made it more and

more difficult for them to operate in Japan.¹⁰ They took literally the slogan "One, two, many Vietnams." Over time, the Red Army Faction evolved into three distinct groups, the Yodo Group, which soon relocated to North Korea, the Japanese Red Army, which relocated to Lebanon, and the United Red Army, which stayed in Japan.

The Yodo Group

Their numbers were few ½ most likely no more than a few dozen, including "sympathizers" ½ but the ambition of the Yodo Group members was grand. In the search for a base for international revolutionary activities, they first favored Cuba, but Cuba was far away, and when a mission there in the early months of 1970 was rebuffed, North Korea was chosen *faute de mieux*.¹¹ On 31 March 1970, nine Red Army Faction members, most of them students aged between sixteen and twenty-seven, brandishing Japanese swords, took over a domestic JAL flight (the plane was named "Yodo") and diverted it to Pyongyang.¹² In the revolutionary base strategy they espoused at the time, North Korea had no special significance; it was simply relatively easily accessible and gave them the first base in their global strategy. Once in North Korea, however, the Yodo Group's goal gradually shifted from world revolution to the liberation of Japan by the adoption of North Korean-style Kim Il Sung Thought. North Korean president Kim Il Sung is said to have taken a keen interest in the young men, visiting them, describing them as "golden eggs," meeting their physical needs (housing, etc.), advising them to take wives, and supervising their ideological remolding. Two years elapsed before the "golden eggs" emerged in public for the first time, on 1 May 1972. Clad in business suits and dark, respectable ties, with badges of Kim Il Sung on their left lapels, they announced to a Japanese media delegation in Pyong½yang their embrace of North Korean "Juche" ideology in place of their hitherto

simultaneous world revolution theory. Over time, they married, raised families, and led privileged, expatriate lives; they traveled extensively. The Japanese authorities now believe that they were involved in money laundering and in the abduction of Japanese citizens from Japan and Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s, most likely with a view to recruiting the forces with which to carry forward a program of armed uprising in Japan.

Lebanon and the PFLP The Japanese Red Army

The second Red Army Faction group, later adopting the name Nihon Sekigun (Japanese Red Army, or JRA) slipped out of Japan in February 1971 to Lebanon, intent upon linking the Japanese and Palestinian struggles as part of global revolution. Joining with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), three of its members launched an attack on Lydda (then Lod) Airport in Tel Aviv on 30 May 1972. Twenty-six people, mostly Puerto Rican tourists, were caught in the crossfire and killed; seventy-six others were wounded. Two of the three Japanese activists committed suicide immediately afterwards; the third, Okai¹/₂moto Kozo, was captured and imprisoned. Between then and September 1977, JRA-affiliated groups were active in Dubai, Singapore, The Hague, Kuala Lum¹/₂pur, and Dacca, occupying embassies, hijacking planes, robbing banks, blowing up refineries. They sought to raise funds to further their broader objectives, to secure the release of captured militants, and to call attention to their international cause. Despite the international stage on which they acted, the JRA faced a similar problem to that of their comrades in North Korea: how to maintain an international revolutionary perspective in the specific circumstances of a local, in their case Palestinian, struggle. As the Yodo Group became adherents of North Korean-style revolutionary theory, so the Japan Red Army narrowed its commitment to international revolution to the specifics of the Palestinian cause.¹³ Their operations followed a

pattern of threat, negotiation, release of imprisoned members, payment of ransoms, and the support, retraining, and integration of new members into the organization. Much of their energy was concentrated on trying to preserve their own organization. After Lod, JRA recruitment films and other propaganda made bold reference to PFLP-sponsored training, and to participation in the armed Palestinian struggle, but whether the group actually participated in any Palestinian operations is unknown.

United Red Army (Rengo Sekigun)

Amid mounting police pressure and tension, those Red Army Faction members who remained in Japan after the departure of the North Korean and Lebanese groups decided to combine with another militant group, Keihin Ampo Kyoto (Tokyo-Yokohama Security Treaty Joint Struggle Committee), pooling money seized in bank robberies by the one with the cache of weapons built up by the other. Ideologically, the Red Army Faction members had been inclined toward the simultaneous world revolution ideas of Che Guevara, while the Keihin (Tokyo-Yokohama) group was oriented toward revolution in one country and influenced by Maoist, Cultural Revolution radicalism.¹⁴ The fruit of the union was Rengo Sekigun (United Red Army, or URA). The militants of URA planned to serve as the guerrillas of the Japanese revolution, coordinating their activities with those of their comrades in North Korea and the Middle East as part of the global revolution.

The comrades of the new organization held a training camp in the depths of the 1971-72 winter at a mountain base in Gunma. Leaders urged members to purify their revolutionary thoughts and to enhance unity through self- and group-criticism. The process spun out of control and became a violent and bloody purge, marked by beatings, punishment, and torture; some twelve members were killed.¹⁵ Having

raised police suspicion, members divided and fled from one hideout to another. They crossed into Nagano near Karuizawa where they entered the *Asama Lodge* and began what developed into a ten-day siege, which was televised almost non-stop nationwide. Two police officers were killed in the siege; the five survivors were jailed. One United Red Army leader committed suicide, the other, Nagata Hiroko, explained her acts as "reactionary, fascist error."¹⁶ She was found guilty and sentenced to death in 1982 (confirmed 1992). As at date of writing, it has yet to be carried out.

The horror of the Asama hut violence, while obvious, is compounded by the realization that it resulted from ordinary social processes, acts committed by plain ordinary people.¹⁷ In the furnace of social isolation, fear of arrest and insistence on fierce discipline, followers lost confidence in their own judgment. Unable to oppose their leaders or the group as a whole, since they thought of doubt as weakness, they redoubled their efforts to prove their commitment and determination.¹⁸ The collective will supplanted individual conscience. In this they behaved indeed as an army, but like the late and unlamented Imperial Japanese Army rather than any democratic, citizen-based army.

The Perspective of Thirty Years

All three groups emanating from the original Red Army Faction ended in varying degrees of tragedy, isolation, and failure.

As of 2003, three members of the Yodo Group had died, two were on trial in Japan, and the remaining four, still living in Pyongyang, had opened negotiations over their desire to return to Japan, even at the cost of inevitable trial and prison terms.¹⁹ What, if any, role they had played as adherents of Kim Il Sung Thought over three decades is unclear. Japanese authorities believe that they, or their wives,

were involved in the 1970s and 1980s North Korean abduction of Japanese citizens from Japan and Europe, and it seems likely that they will face charges on that count as well as over the "Yodo" hijacking itself.²⁰ Their primary concerns today are to defend their own actions, try to minimize their prison terms, and protect their families. During their more than thirty years of exile there is little to indicate that they made any contribution to the betterment of either North Korea or Japan, or to the analysis and understanding of the international situation.

Shigenobu Fusako, leader and public face of the JRA, and in the 1970s the best-known public face of international terrorism (as "Carlos" was to become in the 1980s and 1990s and Osama Bin Laden thereafter), was arrested in November 2000. In March 2001 she formally dissolved the group as she was put on trial for masterminding the Hague hostage incident (1974), in which two police officers died, and for forging and using false passports. Admitting only to passport-related charges, Shigenobu defends the JRA's Palestinian commitment as appropriate in its time and context but apologizes for the civilian casualties. The infamous Lod Airport attack, and subsequent acts, were acts of war, she claims, legitimate as part of the armed struggle for Palestine liberation and of the global struggle against capitalism and imperialism.²¹

Other JRA members are today either undergoing lengthy trials or have completed time in prison. Their contribution to international revolution was limited in practice to the Lod Airport attack and generalized support for the Palestinian cause. Okamoto, the only survivor of the Lod attack, after serving a three-year sentence in Lebanon (1997 to 2000), was granted political asylum there in recognition of his participation in the Palestinian resistance and of his having been tortured in Israeli prisons. In May 2003, he spoke of his wish to return home to Japan: "I

want to know how my old friends are doing there and I want to return to college again to study biology."²²

Shigenobu's books, whether analyzing the Palestine and Middle Eastern situation or her more recent ventures into autobiography, are widely read in Japan,²³ but they offer only a kind of naïf moralism rather than any sustained or original thinking about political structures and national or global systems. Her commitment to the Palestinian cause seems to have been absolute, and to have included both goals and tactics, although she is not known to have taken part herself in any "field" operations. However, her writing shows a reflective and self-critical awareness little evident in the memoirs of her male comrades. "You cannot change society," she says, "without changing yourself."²⁴ Her skills at organization and her pastoral concern for the members of her group have led Patricia Steinoff, the major Western critic of the Red Army, to label her a corporate manager *manquish*.²⁵ When Shigenobu was arrested in November 2000, a blueprint for a new "people's revolutionary party," with a vaguely progressive and populist, and not at all revolutionary flavor, was found among her possessions.²⁶ Her orientation seemed to have shifted from global revolution (in the early 1970s) to Palestinian revolution and now, according to her daughter May, to the struggle against globalization, misinformation, materialism, monopolies, and exploitation: "Seattle was the start. Seeing the way the world is shifting, my mother and I stand united against the slogan *might is right*."²⁷ Neither the media nor, apparently, the prosecutors, question her purity of purpose or integrity, but it is the moral, rather than political content of her message, that is striking.

The United Red Army leader Nagata Hiroko has languished in a death cell since 1982. The URA had formed in the hope of combining, simultaneously, world revolution with revolution in one country, but it made no

measurable contribution to revolutionary theory or practice. Instead, its violent purges had the effect of alienating other Red Army members, large numbers of committed social activists, and the public at large. Theirs remains a cautionary tale of "reactionary, fascist error" within a nominally leftist movement.

For the Yodo Group, Shigenobu's Middle East guerrillas of the JRA, and the URA, ideological purity and correctness of line took precedence over human life. This tendency was further exaggerated as their isolation from society deepened. Yet Red Army members never seem to have thought of themselves as terrorists. In their minds, they were revolutionaries, honorable idealists committed to human betterment. Over the thirty-five years since their founding meetings, however, it is hard to see that they accomplished much in the way of human betterment, whether in the Middle East, North Korea, or Japan itself. Misreading the signs of 1969, they spent much of their lives in pursuit of the chimera of world revolution. The corpus of writing in which they offer their analysis of global events and their reflections on their own lives provides insights into the personal tragedies that overwhelmed them, but little into the dynamics of world history or the shifting structures of national political or economic power.

Some analysts, among them the influential independent Marxist critic Asada Akira, incline now to the view that the Red Army activists were concerned not so much with serious political analysis and action as with nostalgic and romantic escape from reality. For Asada, the Red Army Faction at its peak of activity around 1970 was "subjectivist and romantic, either pursuing an illusory unity with the masses or seeking a quasi-erotic communality of its own." Its macho, martial, male chauvinism helped incline it toward violence and blocked it from any understanding of or cooperation with other social movements of the time.²⁸ In the Japanese

case, this would have included broad-based citizen movement such as the Beheiren (Peace in Vietnam) Committee, which flourished at this time.

While the core male leadership monopolized strategic positions in the organization, the support network was predominantly female. Although Shigenobu Fusako was to become the person most recognized as the JRA leader, both internationally and within Japan, she and other women were little appreciated by their comrades. The comments about her by Shiomi Takaya, former Red Army Faction chairman who was jailed from 1970 to 1989 for his role in the JRA's early activities, compare bleakly with the warmth of recollection of the camaraderie he clearly shared with male comrades. He acknowledged her commitment, drive, and "magical" capacity for administrative work, information gathering, and fund raising, but saw her primarily in a support role.²⁹ Only decades later did he ruefully concede her considerable talent for organization and leadership: after almost thirty years he admitted, "You could say I underestimated her talents."³⁰

A similar, perhaps even more severe, criticism is that the JRA's revolutionary commitment was fundamentally a pose disguising a commitment to traditional values. According to Shiomi, the Red Army Faction members were romantics in the peculiar Japanese vein of traditional nationalist self-sacrifice: "At the heart of the Red Army Faction is romanticism. I can say of myself that I have a positive sort of romanticism and purity of spirit. The Red Army Faction shared an implicitly Japanese sense of romanticism and spirit of self-sacrifice that they held in common with the loyalists in the last days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the prewar right-wing officer training schools and the special attack kamikaze units."³¹ Shiomi lists classic moral tales of social justice and adventure as the formative literary influences on his youth. He was inspired or excited by the

Chinese classic stories, the Romance of the Three Kingdoms and the Water Margin, by the adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the central Asian expeditions of explorer Sven Hedin, and the world of Jules Verne. Hijack leader Tamiya Takamaro was a fan of the manga character "Tomorrow's Jo" and among his comrades the hijack operation was informally known by that name.³² For the Red Army men, action was based on an idealized sense of social justice and morality and driven by a sense of adventure rather than by serious analytic understanding of history. Even while rejecting their times, they were its children.

Aum Shinrikyo ऀ½ Aum Supreme Truth (1987-2000)

Where the Red Army set about implementing a plan for world revolution, Aum initially withdrew from society in order to pursue personal enlightenment, and only later challenged the state in an attempt to supplant it. Like the Red Army activists of two decades earlier, the Aum leaders were ready to use violent means to serve what they believed to be a superior purpose.

Under the leadership of Shoko Asahara, the Guru, the Aum Supreme Truth cult contested the 1990 general election on an essentially religious platform. Some twenty-five candidates ran under their Sanskrit holy names, dressed in white, wearing elephant masks representing the Hindu god Ganesh ("Asahara masks"), chanting religious hymns or the name of the Guru, and warning of apoc½ylypse. When all of them failed dismally, frustration and anger spread, producing a change in tactics, a growing commitment to Armageddon and intensification of discipline, through internal pressures such as sleep deprivation, beatings, and isolation in cages. Although the coming gigantic struggle might involve attacks by ABC (atomic, biological, or chemical) weapons, physical and spiritual preparation could confer immunity.

When the rigors of the training caused the first accidental fatalities, the deaths were covered up. These were followed by the harassment and, in due course, murder of persons who "threatened" the cult, beginning with a lawyer who was investigating it. Later, members seen to be "failing" or having second thoughts about their commitment to the cult were not reintegrated but killed. Over time, the bodies of an unknown number of people, likely between forty and fifty, were disposed of in giant incinerating microwave ovens.

Asahara came to believe that in order to save Japan, he had no choice but to destroy the national government and to set up an Aum dictatorship. To achieve this aim, he had to prepare a chemical and biological arsenal. Armageddon would be the means to his victory. Certain that the apocalypse was coming, Asahara's cult thought at first to ensure survival through religion, but then shifted gradually, in 1988-89, from preparing for the survival of people outside the group to the survival only of the "chosen," and finally, in 1994, to "survival through combat." In order to survive Armageddon they had to become "superhuman." The date of Armageddon was first set as 1999, then moved forward to 1997, and finally to 1995. When the city of Kobe was partly destroyed by an earthquake in January 1995, Asahara interpreted the catastrophe as the beginning of Armageddon; he also believed that the event might have been caused by a U.S. "earthquake machine."

As the final, cataclysmic struggle loomed, Aum developed a quasi-governmental system with its own structures mirroring those of Japan's state and in direct opposition to it. Asahara himself was "shinsei hoo" (sacred master of the law, in effect emperor), and he was surrounded by ministries of Construction, Health and Welfare, Household Agency of Master of the Law, Home Affairs, etc.³³

Aum also made considerable efforts to

internationalize, enjoying considerably more success at this than did the Red Army, which was already a hunted, renegade organization when it began its overseas mission. Aum developed branches in Russia,³⁴ Germany, the United States, and Sri Lanka, and it made a brief foray into Australia.³⁵ Its Internet sites were available in Japanese, Russian, and English.³⁶ Its wealth, estimated in 1995 at between \$300 million and \$1 billion, derived from the savings that new members turned over to the cult, from tax-exempt businesses staffed by cult members, and from fraud and extortion.³⁷

Close attention was paid to organization and logistics. The cult set about the mass production of Russian AK-47 (Kalashnikov) rifles, purchased a large helicopter (for air delivery of chemical weapons), and forged links with sections of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. In their scientific laboratories, Aum had equipment capable of cultivating and testing biological weapons on a large scale, including botulism and sarin, the World War I nerve gas. In 1992, Asahara led a 40-man team to Zaire, possibly in an attempt to secure samples of Ebola virus for propagation.³⁸ On a number of occasions in the early 1990s, Asahara ordered the use of these weapons against strategic state targets in Japan, to strike at enemies and create disasters that would confirm his prophecies. The Japanese parliament was ineffectually attacked in April 1990 with botulin toxin aerosol, and the wedding of the crown prince in June 1993 was targeted (but not actually attacked). Aum reportedly also attempted to spray anthrax spores from the roof of a building in Tokyo later that month. There were no casualties from any of these attacks.³⁹

Unlike the Red Army militants, Asahara's Aum developed for a long time in relative immunity from police attention, benefiting from the protection it enjoyed as a religious organization. Yet its inner, religious orientation

steadily became secularized. After the Japanese state, the United States was Aum's second target; the world Jewish community its third, along with the Freemasons. Aum claimed that the Jews had taken advantage of Japan's devastation after World War II as a step in their conspiracy to achieve total world domination. The United States was seen as controlled by Jewish capital, which also directed the Freemasons, while the Freemasons were manipulating the United Nations to achieve universal control. Jews were accused of the massacres in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Cambodia. In 1992, a vast shadowy power $\frac{1}{2}$ variously identified as Japan, the United States, and a conspiracy of Jews, Freemasons, the British royal family, and rival Japanese religions $\frac{1}{2}$ was expected to launch a third world war.⁴⁰ Asahara thought it likely that Japan would be attacked by the United States, which he identified with "the Beast" in the Book of Revelation. The United States and the West, in general, were accused of spreading rampant materialism and internationalism, which were the root of Japan's problems.

Early in 1994 Asahara accused the United States of masterminding and carrying out a series of chemical attacks on himself and on Aum facilities in Japan. Aum insisted that the sect was not the producer of sarin gas, but rather its victim, and that Japanese and American aircraft were swooping low over their compound to spray it with gas. Only in early 1995, on the eve of the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway, did the Tokyo Metropolitan Police begin to investigate Aum seriously. Aum's response to the investigation was the gas attack on 20 March. Planned and executed clumsily, using only a small batch of low-grade sarin that was released from plastic bags by a prod with the steel tip of an umbrella, the attack was less successful than initially feared, but it profoundly shocked the nation and the world. Twelve people died, fifty-four were critically injured, and about one thousand sustained various types of injuries, most of

them relatively minor.⁴¹

After the attack, police raided the cult's facilities nationwide and dismantled the organization. Hundreds of cult members were rounded up, but it was nearly two months before Asahara himself was arrested, on 16 May. In the intervening weeks, the cult carried out further attacks, including the shooting of the Tokyo police commissioner (who survived) and an abortive attack with an improvised cyanide gas generator at a Tokyo train station. The cult's minister of science and technology, Murai Hideo, was stabbed to death on the street, in front of TV cameras, shortly after the subway attack.

The most authoritative study of Aum (Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan, by Ian Reader) reads Asahara's late sermons as indicative of "a desperate and destructive mood rather than the focused calculations of an evil genius plotting to take over the world." "We are living, he [Asahara] declared, in the Kali Yuga, the final era in Hindu thought, in which evil karma abounds and in which all who dwell in this world are dragged spiritually downwards." In such an era, Reader contends, there could be little prospect of salvation. Allegations of conspiracy and paranoia about spies, in the years leading to 1995, are indicative of "a process of mental disturbance and instability, and of a slide towards despair."⁴² Aum's crimes "were all ad hoc and reactive outbursts of violence directed against individual enemies. $\frac{1}{2}$ The attacks on the general public were also carried out to prevent something happening," not to initiate a program.⁴³

Although stripped of its legal status and tax privileges as a religious organization in 1995, Aum Shinrikyo revived its activities in early 1997 after the government concluded that surveillance should continue, but that the organization was no longer a threat requiring total suppression. The government tried repeatedly from 1997 onwards to invoke the

1952 Anti-Subversive Activities Law to outlaw Aum, but the semipublic Public Security Examination Commission refused to make the necessary determination. Specific legislation (needing to be renewed every five years) was therefore passed in 1999, under which the Public Security Investigation Agency (PISA) was commissioned to monitor and control Aum as a group that had been involved in indiscriminate mass murder over the previous decade.

Of ten thousand Aum followers in 1995, one thousand were full-time dedicated "monks" between twenty and thirty years of age. Some 400 Aum disciples were arrested in the ensuing crackdown; 155 resumed their membership and activities after being released.⁴⁴ In February 2000 Aum changed its name to Aleph. The organization now insists that it is purely religious in character. It denounces all forms of violence, apologizes for the horrors committed under Asahara (whom it describes as "a kind of genius in meditation" whose acts, however, it could not approve of), and promises four billion yen (ca. US\$40 million) in compensation for the Aum victims.⁴⁵ During 2002, 103 locations in fifteen prefectures were searched and twenty followers arrested.⁴⁶ By December 2002 Aleph's nationwide membership was reportedly 1,650, of whom 650 were live-in. This figure dropped in February 2003 to 1,194, of whom 522 were live-in. The average age of members is thirty-five, and few younger people seem to be joining.⁴⁷ Businesses and stores associated with the organization continue to earn billions of yen each year, and the organization still owns (December 2002) twenty-eight compounds in eighteen Japanese prefectures for religious training, missionary work, and other operations. Membership in Aum's Russian branch, about thirty thousand in 1995, was estimated by the Japanese authorities in 2003 to be down to three hundred.⁴⁸ In 2003, surveillance was ordered for a further three years, although the attitude of the sect was described as "cooperative" and no signs of

terror had been reported.⁴⁹

The trial of Asahara Shoko on charges relating to twenty-seven murders, including the subway killings, was conducted at the Tokyo District Court from April 1996 to November 2003. Asahara remained silent throughout, save for occasional, mostly incomprehensible mumbling. His trial ended with prosecutors describing him as "the most vicious criminal in our country's history" and demanding the death sentence. A ruling is expected early in 2004.⁵⁰ Nine leading members of the cult had already been sentenced to death and six to life imprisonment, but appeals may prolong the proceedings for a good many years to come.⁵¹

Conclusion

By the generally agreed upon understanding of the word, both the Red Army and Aum qualify for designation as terrorist.⁵² They employed violence against both state and non-state targets in an attempt to coerce governments and societies to adopt their programs. Bassiouni's psychological profile of the terrorist seems apt: heightened perception of oppressive conditions, real or presumed; firm conviction in the possibility of modifying them; belief that conditions cannot be ameliorated peacefully and that it is therefore necessary to resort to violence in order for change to take place; awareness that violent action may not necessarily be successful in effecting social or political change, accompanied by the belief that it is sufficient to set the stage for such desired change; and the belief that their goals ultimately justify the casualties caused by their action. Such a mind-set leads to deliberate efforts to create and exploit a climate of fear in order to publicize the cause widely and to coerce their target into submission.

Fred Halliday has drawn a typology of five phases in the evolution of post-1945 terror: successful struggles for independence against colonial states (as in Kenya and Algeria);

unsuccessful but ongoing nationalist movements (as in Palestine or the Spanish Basque region); leftist campaigns for domestic revolutionary political and social change (as in Latin America, Italy, the United States, and Japan, with the Tupai¹/₂maros, Red Brigades, Weather²/₂men, and Red Army respectively); right-³/₂wing domestic campaigns of terror, as in the 1970s and 1980s in France and Italy; and the religiously inspired terrorism of the 1980s, mostly in Muslim countries.⁵³ While Japan's Red Army fits in the third of these categories, the Aum Supreme Truth cult, with its commitment to violent means to achieve religious and political ends (the construction of an essentially secular nation state), would seem to combine elements from Halliday's third and fifth categories and therefore to warrant a category of its own.

However, as Halliday himself notes, although most contemporary usage refers only to acts of terror committed against governments, much violence is committed by states, and the term "state terrorism" has deep historical roots. States, and those who act for them, can and do terrorize their own citizens along with those of other states, and should be subject to criminal liability for their actions. Acts of aggression, including genocide or the bombing of civilians or the deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure, are war crimes committed by states that are also acts of terror. Weapons of mass destruction ⁴/₂ nuclear weapons, especially ⁵/₂ are all by definition terror weapons. Richard Falk offers a broad, if also sobering, definition: "Terrorism designates any type of political violence that lacks an adequate moral and legal justification, regardless of whether the actor is a revolutionary group or a government." He adds,

What is disturbing about the phenomenon of terrorism is its normality within our own culture. From this perspective, we are virtually all terrorists, at least in the passive sense of endorsing or at least acquiescing in

indiscriminate violence against enemies.⁶ Terrorists, as practitioners of indiscriminate and impermissible violence, are prominent among both those who are ultimate outsiders and those who are our biggest winners. (emphasis added)⁵⁴

The Red Army and Aum members are undoubtedly losers (in Falk's sense), but it is as necessary, and even more difficult, to bring state terrorist winners to account as it is to punish terrorist acts committed by individuals or groups.

The Japanese state deplores terrorism in general and is a committed supporter of George W. Bush's "war on terrorism." However, its concept of "terror" is highly specific. The Japanese state is sensitive to certain kinds of "state terror," such as the abduction of its citizens in the 1970s and 1980s by North Korea, but not to others, especially those of the United States in relation to Afghanistan, Iraq, or elsewhere. Prime Minister Koizumi grieves for the civilian victims of the September 11 attack on the United States, but not for the far greater number of equally innocent civilian victims of the Afghan and Iraq wars. Furthermore, while the Japanese government today pledges full support for the campaign against "terror," its leaders, including Koizumi, continue to endorse Japan's own suicide bombers, the kamikaze of World War II ⁷/₂ prominent progenitors of the modern "terrorist."⁵⁵ While the Imperial Japanese Army committed terrorist acts on a vast scale across Asia and caused the deaths of millions, it still occupies a semi-sacrosanct position in Japanese society, and not one single member has ever been punished for any atrocity committed in the name of the emperor. No such exemption would be enjoyed by the militants of the Red Army or the visionaries of Aum.

The official abhorrence of terror and terrorism in Japan is also selective in the sense that the

phenomenon of right-wing terror is downplayed, although it is very real in the everyday life of people. A major political assassination in 1960 and an attempted coup d'état in 1970 were right-wing acts of political violence against the left. Other cases of intimidation, violence, and assassination of political or media figures by right-wing groups are not uncommon – the murder of an Asahi Shimbun journalist in Nishinomiya City in 1987, the attempted assassination of the mayor of Nagasaki in 1990, and the murder of a prominent opposition politician in 2002 being among the best-known cases. In September 2002, the governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintaro, declared that it was perfectly understandable that a Ministry of Foreign Affairs official who had been centrally involved in negotiations with North Korea should be the subject of an attempted bomb attack. Political leaders issued mild statements distancing themselves from his view, but shied away from calling it what it was: a high-level endorsement of terrorism.⁵⁶ While the word "terror" is reserved for non-state-backed extremist groups, the fact is that not only this Foreign Ministry official but also others challenging the unspoken consensus of Japanese politics have faced, and continue to face, the threat or reality of violence.⁵⁷

Both the Red Army and the Aum Supreme Truth cult began as utopian and idealistic, yet the one is best remembered for the Yodo hijacking and the Asama Lodge siege and the other for the gas attack in the Tokyo subway. As their visionary goals were frustrated, both groups lost their grip on reality and turned inwards into a besieged and self-constructed world in which those outside the movement were unworthy while those inside were transformed into heroic or sacred warriors. They came to think in terms of a global axis, with good confronting evil, in which "our" side is blessed by divine support and the other is unambiguously evil, and to believe "our" cause so important that it justifies any means –

including killing. Trimmed to its core logic, however, this is not an unfamiliar position, nor is it confined to left-wing or religious movements. It is the same logic and morality as now drives the global superpower, the United States, whose president also speaks in terms of good vs. evil and justifies whatever steps, including setting aside international law and treaties and waging preemptive war, in his insistence that his cause is absolutely just and good. Although the terror discourse tends to be appropriated by states to designate their non-state enemies, the fact is that indiscriminate violence in the hands of irresponsible groups who believe firmly that they are right and good is the problem, whether the party concerned is backed by a state or not. At a deep level, the JRA and Asahara, the ultimate "outsiders" (in Richard Falk's characterization) share crucial assumptions and values with George W. Bush, the presumed "winner."

Having crushed and defeated both the Red Army and Aum, the Japanese state's formula for addressing terror combines vigorous proactive and punitive tactics with preemption. While trials grind on in the courts and prosecutors fill their files with evidence for more trials to come, a network of surveillance and control is woven over the society in a bid to prevent any such groups emerging again in future. The "hatred and mass hysteria" generated by Red Army and Aum violence feed a fear and paranoia, and a desire for increased public safety.⁵⁸ Like the U.S. state, which since September 11 has concentrated on identification, surveillance, and when adjudged necessary the preventive detention of the "other" within, the Japanese state has been able to pass legislation unthinkable at any time in the past, extending the prerogatives of state power to deal with "emergencies" and to create files on citizens.⁵⁹ The bureaucratic solution, however, may not always be the best solution. After all, it was the narrowing of the frame of legitimate citizen activity and social meaning in

the postwar decades to obedience, consumption, and profit that nurtured the Red Army and Aum. Attempting to neutralize such groups now through the adoption of the apparatus of "citizen surveillance, institutionalized harassment, and state-sponsored discrimination"⁶⁰ might have the opposite effect of isolating and spurring them into action. Patricia Steinhoff goes so far as to say that "labeling [as extremist or terrorist] may have co-opted the majority, but it made the minority more radical. In this sense, it is fair to say that government actions have created terrorism and other forms of urban guerrilla activity."⁶¹

Neither the Red Army nor Aum was inherently "evil." One saw itself as a unit in an international war that would bring about a better world, the other as the last hope of a beleaguered humanity. While in the end the Japanese state determined it had no alternative but to crush and punish members of both groups, the fact that it came to that meant that the state had already failed. Instead of driving out and then crushing the groups, a more dynamic and open civil society might have engaged with them and found channels for the constructive expression of their idealism.

Notes

1. In the age of globalization, this is increasingly common practice. See Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor, and Helmut Anheier, eds., *Global Civil Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), iii-iv.

2. Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston: Little Brown, 1977).

3. A flurry of conferences and publications marked the fiftieth anniversary of these failed efforts. For a brief review, see Iwadare Hiroshi, "Ima naze sakano 50 nendai gakusei undo no kaiko to kensho," *Shukan kinyobi*, 26 July 2002,

32-35.

4. See Gavan McCormack, "The Student Left in Japan," *New Left Review*, no. 65 (January-February 1971): 37-53.

5. Peter J. Katzenstein and Tsujinaka Yutaka, *Defending the Japanese State: Structures, Norms and the Political Responses to Terrorism and Violent Social Protest in the 1970s and 1980s* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1991), 20.

6. Even after the subway attack, the Dalai Lama referred to Asahara as "my friend, but not necessarily a perfect one." David E. Kaplan and Andrew Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1996), 260. See also, Ian Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyo* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 68.

7. Reader, *Religious Violence*, 61.

8. *Ibid.*, 121-23.

9. M. Cherif Bassiouni, *Legal Responses to International Terrorism: U.S. Procedural Aspects* (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), xxx-xxxiii.

10. For a chronology of the student movement, see Katzenstein and Tsujinaka, *Defending the Japanese State*, 16-18, 22-23. For a short, more up-to-date analysis, with bibliography, see Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Student Protest in the 1960s," *Social Science Japan*, March 1999, 3-6.

11. On the Cuba venture, see Shiomi Takaya, *Sekigun-ha shimatsu ki, Moto gicho ga kataru 40 nen* [The Red Army put in perspective: 40 years, as told by its former chairman] (Tokyo: Sairyuusha, 2003), 106.

12. For details, see McCormack, "The Student Left in Japan," 47.

13. William R. Farrell, *Blood and Rage: The*

- Story of the Japanese Red Army (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1990), 158.
14. Kino Yasushi, *Asama sanso jiken no shinjitsu* (Tokyo: Kawade Shinsha Shobo, 2000), 9-10.
 15. Nagata Hiroko, "Jiko hihan ½ Rengo Sekigun no ayamachi o kurikaesanai tame ni," part 2, *Impakushon*, no. 20 (30 October 1982): 104-119, at 104. Also Kino, *Asama sanso jiken no shinjitsu*, 314-16, and for a sensitive portrait, see Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Three Women Who Loved the Left: Radical Women Leaders in the Japanese Red Army," in *Re-imagining Japanese Women*, ed. Anne E. Imamura (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).
 16. Nagata, "Jiko hihan," 106.
 17. Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Managerial Style in the Japanese Red Army," *Journal of Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (November 1989): 724-740, at 735.
 18. Other groups were also caught in this spiral around the same time, notably the East Asian Anti-Japanese Armed Front (EAAJAF). The EAAJAF moved from bombing monuments and symbols of the emperor system and of Japanese colonialism to planning an attack on the person of the emperor himself. Plans went awry and the bomb was instead detonated at the headquarters of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, killing 8 and injuring 576 people. Two death sentences and one life sentence related to this incident were handed down and then confirmed in 1987. Three group members were "sprung" from prison in 1975 and 1977; two of them remain at large.
 19. "Yodogo jiken: Menba 4 nin ga kikoku tetsuzuki," *Mainichi shimbun*, 9 July 2002.
 20. Several television documentaries, which draw extensively on police intelligence, were produced in 2002 and 2003, including *Nihon TV's Sekigun Jiken no Onnatachi* [The women of the Red Army incidents], broadcast 24 December 2002.
 21. Shigenobu Fusako, "Nihon sekigun wa nani o kangaete ita no ka," in *Sekigun ½ Red Army, 1969-2001* [Kawade yume mukku, Bungei bessatsu], ed. Abe Harumasa (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2001), 2-8.
 22. "Seventies-era Terrorist Who Killed Dozens Wants to Come Home, Go to College," *Japan Times*, 8 May 2003.
 23. See the following works by Shigenobu Fusako: *Waga ai waga kakumei* [My love, my revolution] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1974); *Beiruto 1982 nen natsu* [Beirut, summer of 1982] (Tokyo: Hanashi no tokushu, 1984); *Daichi ni mimi o tsukereba Nihon no oto ga suru* [If you put your ear to the ground Japan can be heard] (Unita Shoho [publisher] and Aki Shobo [distributor], 1984); and, most recently, *Ringo no ki no shita de anata o umo to kimeta* [Beneath the apple tree I decided to give birth to you] (Tokyo: Gentosha, 2001).
 24. Shigenobu, *Ringo no ki no shita de anata o umo to kimeta*, 71.
 25. Steinhoff, "Managerial Style in the Japanese Red Army," 733.
 26. *Japan Times*, 19 November 2000.
 27. *Ibid.* 14 July 2001.
 28. Asada Akira, "A Left within the Place of Nothingness," *New Left Review*, no. 5 (September-October 2000): 15-40, at 19.
 29. Shiomi, *Sekigun-ha shimatsu ki*, 32-6.
 30. *Ibid.*, 56
 31. *Ibid.* 191-92.
 32. *Ibid.*

56. Editorial, "Ishihara's Latest Furor," Asahi shimbun, 12 September 2003.

57. For a recent case, concerning the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, convened in Tokyo in December 2000, which subsequently found Emperor Hirohito, among others, guilty of war crimes, see Takahashi Tetsuya (in discussion with Henmi Yo), "Watakui¹/₂shii¹/₂tachi wa dono yo na jidai ni ikite iru ka," Sekai, September 2002, 40-54, at 45.

58. Tatsuya Mori, director of two documentaries on Aum: "A" and "A2," quoted in Eric Johnston, "Aum Bred Social Cult of Fear, Passion for Security," Japan Times, 30 October 2003.

59. On the National Resident Registry Network set up in August 2002 to centralize and facilitate government access to personal data on all citizens (organized according to 11-digit individual numbers), see articles in Japan Times, 6 and 8 August 2002, and the Japanese website www.nttpc.info/Help/1253.html.

60. Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Three Paths to Enlightenment about Aum Shinrikyo," Journal of Japanese Studies 27, no. 1 (2001): 143-52, at 150.

61. Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Student Conflict," in Conflict in Japan, ed. Ellis S. Krauss, Thomas P. Rohlen, and Patricia G. Steinhoff (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 174-213, at 208.

Note: This is a text-only version of an article published in the March 2004 issue of Critical Asian Studies (vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 91-112). The complete article (in typeset form, with photographs) is available at the Taylor and Francis website: www.tandf.co.uk/journals.

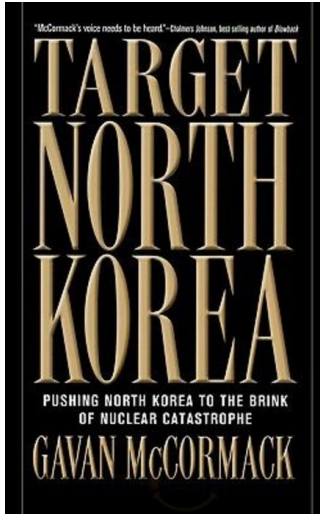
Meredith Box is a graduate student in anthropology at the Australian National University (Canberra). Her research focuses on pre-war Japanese youth organizations, particularly the social and personal processes by which individuals select and internalize social values and myth. Formerly a lecturer in Japanese language and culture, she runs a Japanese translation and interpreting service in Tokyo and Canberra. Email: mjbox@ozemail.Com.au (<https://apjff.org/mailto:mjbox@ozemail.Com.au>).

Gavan McCormack is professor in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at Australian National University and visiting professor at International Christian University in Tokyo. His recent books include The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence and, with Glenn Hook, Japan's Contested Constitution. His Target North Korea: Pushing North Korea to the Brink of Nuclear Catastrophe was published in 2004. Email: gavan@icu.ac.jp (<https://apjff.org/mailto:gavan@icu.ac.jp>).

Their Bibliography: Terror in Japan

Is available at <http://www.bcasnet.org>

Posted at Japan Focus on June 15, 2004.



(<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1560255579/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20>)

Click on the cover to order.



(<http://www.amazon.com/dp/184467133X/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20>)

Click on the cover to order.