

The Global Rise of Religious Nationalism

Mark Juergensmeyer

As we see every day in the news, a disturbing aspect of the globalization of religion is the violent conflicts, worldwide, that are rooted in religion or expressed in religious terms. To author Mark Juergensmeyer, such conflicts are expressions of religious nationalism, an ideology that combines traditional religious beliefs in divine law and authority with the modern notion of the nation-state. Frequently associated with quests for ethnic autonomy, religious nationalism draws on a religion as a repository of powerful symbols, ready to be tapped and put into action, as politics come to be seen in religious terms. Citing examples from across the globe, Juergensmeyer identifies patterns common to all such movements, discerning surprising similarities in such cases as the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and the Iranian revolution of 1979.

*The present article was originally published shortly before the World Trade Center tragedy of September 11, 2001. Readers may wish to consult Juergensmeyer's books on this topic, including *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (University of California Press, 2000).*

If it can be said that the modernist ideology of the post-Enlightenment West effectively separated religion from public life, then what has happened in recent years—since the watershed Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979—is religion's revenge. After years of waiting in history's wings, religion has renewed its claim to be an ideology of public order in a dramatic fashion: violently. From Algeria to Idaho, a legion of religious activists have expressed a hatred of secular governments that exudes an almost transcendent passion, and they dream of revolutionary changes that will establish a godly social order in the rubble of what the citizens of most secular societies regard as modern, egalitarian democracies.

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Their enemies seem to most of us to be both benign and banal: modern secular leaders such as Indira Gandhi and Yitzhak Rabin and such symbols of prosperity and authority as international airlines and the World Trade Center. The logic of their ideological religious view is, although difficult to comprehend, profound, for it contains a fundamental critique of the world's post-Enlightenment sect culture and politics. In many cases, especially in areas of the world where modernization is a synonym for Westernization, movements of religious nationalism have served as liberation struggles against w their supporters perceive to be alien ideologies, and foreign powers.

"Palestine is not completely free," a leader of Hamas's policy wing told me, "until it is an Islamic state." The Hamas activist voiced this opinion only a few months before the January 1996 elections, an event that not only brought Yasir Arafat triumphantly into power but also fulfilled the Palestinian dream of an independent

nation. Yet it was not the kind of nation that the Islamic activist and his Hamas colleagues had hoped for. For that reason, they refused to run candidates for public office and urged their followers to boycott the polls. They threatened that the movement would continue to carry out "political actions" as the Hamas leader called them—terrorist attacks such as the series of suicide bombings conducted by a militant faction that rocked Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and elsewhere in Israel in February and March 1996, threatening to destroy the peace process and Arafat's fragile alliance.

On the Israeli side of the border, Jewish activists have also attacked the secular leadership of their nation, and again a virulent mixture of religion and politics has led to bloodshed. Yigal Amir, who is accused of assassinating Israel's prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in Tel Aviv on 4 November 1995, claimed that he had religious reasons for his actions, saying that "everything I did, I did for the glory of God." Amir has adamantly rejected attempts by his lawyers to assert that he was not guilty by reason of insanity. "I am at peace" he explained, insisting that he was "totally normal." His murder of Rabin, Amir argued, was deliberate and even praiseworthy under a certain reading of religious law that allows for a defense against those who would destroy the Jewish nation.

A few weeks before the assassination, a conversation with Jewish activists near Hebron indicated that they shared many of Amir's views. They were still grieving over the killing of Dr. Baruch Goldstein by an angry Muslim crowd in February 1995, after he murdered thirty-five Muslims as they were saying their prayers in the mosque at the Cave of the Patriarchs, revered as the burial place of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Goldstein's grave has now been made into a shrine. The militant Jews at the site explained that acts such as Dr. Goldstein's were necessary not only to protect the land but also to defend the very notion of a Jewish nation—one that for reasons of redemption and history had to be established on biblical terrain. Religious duty required them to become involved politically and even militarily. "Jews" one of them said, "have to learn to worship in a national way."

This potentially explosive mixture of nationalism and religion is an ingredient even in incidents that might appear initially to be isolated

terrorist incidents: the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City on 19 April 1995, for instance, or the 20 March 1995 nerve gas attack on a Tokyo subway station. In the Oklahoma City case, the Christian militia movements with which Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols have been associated have accepted a certain conspiratorial view of American politics: the nation is not free, they reason, because of a vast international conspiracy involving Jews and Freemasons. They believe that the nation needs to be liberated through an armed struggle that will establish America as an independent and Christian nation.

Strangely, the same conspiracy was articulated by members of Aum Shinrikyo (On Supreme Truth), the eclectic Buddhist-Hindu religious movement in Japan that has been accused of unleashing canisters of nerve gas in a Tokyo subway station, killing twelve people and injuring thousands. A young man who had been public affairs officer for the main Tokyo headquarters of the movement at the time said that the first thing that came to his mind when he heard about the attack was that the "weird time had come": the Third World War was about to begin. He had been taught by his spiritual master, Shoko Asahara, that Armageddon was imminent. He had also been taught that the Japanese government, in collusion with America and an international network of Freemasons and Jews, had triggered the January 1995 Kobe earthquake and then planned the nerve gas attack. He was surprised when Asahara himself was implicated in the plot—after all the spiritual leader had portrayed himself as the protector of Japanese society and had begun to create an alternative government that would control the country after Armageddon had ended.

In all these cases, the alleged perpetrators possessed world views that justified the brutality of such terrorist acts: they perceived a need to defend their faiths and held a heady expectation that what they did would lead to radically new social and political orders. The events they staged were therefore religious as much as they were political and provide examples of religious involvement and political change that might seem, at first glance, to be curiously out of step with the twentieth century.

But these religious rebels against modernity are becoming increasingly vocal. Their small but potent groups of violent activists represent

growing masses of supporters, and they exemplify currents of thinking that have risen to counter the prevailing modernism the ideology of individualism and skepticism that in the past three centuries has emerged from post Enlightenment Europe and spread throughout the world. For that reason, and because of the rising tide of violence associated with movements of religious nationalism in the Middle East, South Asia, and elsewhere, it is important to try to understand what religious nationalists want: why they hate secular governments with such a virulent passion, how they expect to effect their virtually revolutionary changes, and what sort of social and political order they dream of establishing in their own vision of a coming world order.

The Ideological Dimensions of Religious Nationalism

Some forms of religious nationalism are largely ethnic—that is, linked to people and land. The struggle of the Irish—both Protestant and Catholic—to claim political authority over the land in which they live is a paradigmatic example. The attempts of Muslims in Chechnya to assert their independence from the rule of Russia, and other Muslims in Tajikistan to assert a cultural element to Tajikistan's resurgent nationalism, are examples that have emerged in the wake of the collapse of the former Soviet Union. In what used to be Yugoslavia, several groups of ethnic religious nationalists are pitted against one another: Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and Muslim Bosnians and Kosovars. In South Asia, the independence movements of Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus, Kashmiri Muslims, and to some extent the Khalistan supporters in the Punjab are also movements of ethnic religious nationalism. In these cases, religion provides the identity that makes a community cohere and links it with a particular place.

Ideological religious nationalism is attached to ideas and beliefs. In using the term "ideology" I mean a framework of values and moral positions. In the case of religious nationalism, the ideology combines traditional religious beliefs in divine law and religious authority with the modern notion of the nation-state. If the ethnic religious nationalism politicizes religion by employing religious identities for political ends, an ideological form of religious nationalism does the

opposite: it *religionizes* politics. It puts political issues and struggles within a sacred context. Compatibility with religious goals becomes the criterion for an acceptable political platform.

The Islamic revolution in Iran, for instance, was a classic example of ideological religious nationalism that turned ordinary politics upside down. Instead of a nonreligious political order providing space for religious activities—which in the West we regard as the "normal" arrangement—in Iran, a religious authority set the context for politics. In fact the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran provides for a "just ruler" a cleric such as the Ayatollah Khomeini, who will be the ultimate arbiter in legislating the moral basis of politics. For that reason, the Iranian experience was a genuine revolution, an extraordinary change from the modern Westernized nation that the Shah prior to the Ayatollah had imagined for Iran. Because ideological religious nationalism embraces religious ideas as the basis for politics, national aspirations become fused with religious quests for purity and redemption, and religious law replaces secular law as the pillar of governmental authority. Although the enemy of ethnic religious nationalists is a rival ethnicity—usually the dominant group that has been controlling them—ideological religious nationalists do not need to look beyond their own ethnic community to find an ideological foe: they often loathe their own kind. As Yigal Amir dramatically illustrated when he shot Yitzhak Rabin, religious nationalists may target as enemies the secular leaders of their own nations. For that reason, tensions have been growing in nominally Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Turkey, where militant Islamic revolutionaries have identified their own moderate Muslim leaders as obstacles to progress. In the United States, it appears that this passionate hatred of secular government led to incidents such as Ruby Ridge and the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. In India, a widespread disdain for secular politics has propelled the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) into becoming the largest movement for religious nationalism in the world. Buddhist movements in Sri Lanka, Mongolia, and Tibet have characterized their secular political opponents as being not just immoral and unprincipled but also enemies of dhammic (righteous) social order.

Some religious nationalists see their own

secular leaders as part of a wider, virtually global conspiracy—one controlled by vast political and economic networks sponsored by European and American powers. For that reason, they may hate not only the politicians in their home countries but also these leaders' political and economic allies in lands far beyond their own national boundaries. Islamic militants associated with Egypt's radical Gamaa i-Islamiya (Islamic Group), for example, have attacked not only Egyptian politicians—killing President Anwar Sadat and attempting to kill his successor, Hosni Mubarak—but also foreigners.

The Gamaa i-Islamiya literally moved its war against secular powers abroad when its leader, Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman, moved to New Jersey and became involved in a bombing attack on the World Trade Center on 26 February 1993 that killed six and injured a thousand more. The trial that convicted him in January 1996 of conspiracy in the attack also implicated him in an elaborate plot to blow up a variety of sites in the New York City area, including the United Nations buildings and the Lincoln Tunnel. Algerian Muslim activists have brought their war against secular Algerian leaders to Paris, where they have been implicated in a series of subway bombings in 1995. Hassan Turabi in Sudan has been accused of orchestrating Islamic rebellions in a variety of countries, linking Islamic activists in common cause against what is seen as the great satanic power of the secular West. In some cases, this conspiratorial vision has taken bizarre twists, as in the view shared by both the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo and certain American Christian militia movements that Jews and Freemasons are collaborating to control the world.

Often religious nationalism is "ethno-ideological" in that it is both ethnic and ideological in character. Such religious nationalists have double sets of enemies: their ethnic rivals and the secular leaders of their own people. Their efforts at delegitimization are "split" between secular and religious foes. The Hamas movement in Palestine is a prime example. While waging a war of independence against Israel they are simultaneously sparring with Yasir Arafat; often the attacks leveled at Israelis are also intended to wound the credibility of Arafat's fledgling Palestinian Authority. It is not a coincidence that the Hamas suicide bombings aimed at Israelis increased in the months

immediately before and after the January 1996 elections—a poll that Hamas wished to discredit. The leaders of the movement believed, as their founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin said in a conversation several years ago, that "the only true Palestinian state is an Islamic state." This means that the movement must simultaneously war against both Israeli leaders such as Rabin and Peres and secular Palestinian leaders such as Arafat.

Like the militant Muslims in Hamas, the Sikh separatists that flourished in Northern India until 1993 were both ethnic and ideological and, like their Palestinian counterparts, also had a double set of enemies. In the Sikh case, the Khalistani side of the movement aimed at creating a separate nation of Sikhs and tried to purge the rural Punjab of Hindus. But there was also a more ideologically religious side to the movement, the one led by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, which aimed at establishing the Sikh religious tradition as authoritative in both secular and political spheres and targeted moderate Sikh leaders and secular politicians as foes. Followers of this wing succeeded in assassinating several important secular politicians including Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. A spectacular explosion that killed Punjab's chief minister, Beant Singh, on 31 August 1995, shows that some aspects of the movement are still potent threats to civil order.

Other movements of religious nationalism—even ones that appear to be primarily ethnic—may also have, at some level an ideological component. This is so because religion, the repository of traditions of symbols and beliefs, stands ready to be tapped by those who wish to develop a new framework of ideas about social order. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, for example, the anger of Serbs frequently described in the media as the residue of ancient ethnic rivalries—is also fueled by an imaginative religious myth. The Serb leaders are Orthodox Christians who see themselves as surrogate Christ figures in a contemporary political understanding of the Passion narrative. A drama and an epic poem have been invented to retell the New Testament's account of Christ's death in a way that portrays historical Serbian leaders as Christ figures, and Muslims in both Bosnia and Kosovo as Judases. This mythologized dehumanization of the Muslims allows them to be regarded as a

subhuman species, one that in the Serbian imagination deserves the genocidal attacks of "ethnic cleansing" that killed so many in the darkest hours of the Kosovo conflict and the Bosnian civil war. As these cases show, there is often a fine line between ethnic and ideological forms of religious nationalism.

In general, ethnic religious nationalism is easier for modern Americans and Europeans to understand, even though it may be just as violent as ideological nationalism. The London terrorist bombings by the Irish Republican Army after the cease-fire broke down in February 1996, and the Sri Lankan Tamils' suicide attacks that demolished downtown Colombo in January 1996, are examples. Yet these acts of violence are understandable because they are aimed at a society that the terrorists regard as exerting direct military or political control over them. The violence of ideological religious movements is focused on those who are ideologically different—secularists—and whose control over them may be cultural and economic, and therefore less obvious. But their impact on the changing shape of global politics is perhaps even more profound.

The Logic of Ideological Religious Nationalism

Since the mid-1980s, I have been following movements of ideological religious nationalism in various parts of the world with the hope of discerning common patterns or themes within them. Although each movement is shaped by its own historical and social context, there are some common elements due in part to the massive economic and political changes of this moment in history, an experience that has been shared by many around the world. What follows, then, is an attempt to identify the stages in development of ideological religious nationalism that has resulted from this common experience, beginning with the disaffection over the dominance of modern Western culture and what is perceived to be its political ally, secular nationalism.

Despair over Secular Nationalism

The shifts in economic and political power that have occurred following the breakup of the Soviet Union and the sudden rise and fall of Japanese and other Asian economies in the past

fifteen years have had significant social repercussions. The public sense of insecurity that has come in the wake of these changes is felt not only in the societies of those nations that are economically devastated by the changes—especially countries in the former Soviet Union—but also in economically stronger areas as well. The United States, for example, has seen a remarkable degree of disaffection with its political leaders and witnessed the rise of rightwing religious movements that feed on the public's perception of the immorality of government. At the extreme end of this religious rejection are the militant Christian militias and cults such as Waco's Branch Davidian sect. Similar movements have emerged in Japan, which is also experiencing disillusion about its national purpose and destiny. As in America, the critique and sectarian experiments with its alternatives often take religious forms, including new religious movements such as Soka Gakkai, Agon-shu, and the now infamous Aum Shinrikyo.

The global shifts that have led to a crisis of national purpose in developed countries have, in a somewhat different way, affected developing nations as well. Leaders such as India's Jawaharlal Nehru, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Iran's Riza Shah Pahlavi had once been pledged to creating versions of America—or a kind of cross between America and the Soviet Union—at home. But a new generation of leaders is emerging in countries that were formerly European colonies, and they no longer believe in the Westernized vision of Nehru, Nasser, or the Shah. Rather, they are eager to complete the process of decolonization. They want to assert the legitimacy of their countries' own traditional values in the public sphere, and to build a "postcolonial" national identity based on indigenous culture. This eagerness is made all the more keen when confronted with the media assault of Western music, videos, and films that satellite television now beams around the world, and which threaten to obliterate local and traditional forms of cultural expression.

The result of this disaffection with the culture of the modern West has been what I have called a "loss of faith" in the ideological form of that culture, secular nationalism. Although a few years ago it would have been a startling notion, the idea has now become virtually commonplace that nationalism as we know it in the modern West is

in crisis, in large part because it is seen as a cultural construction closely linked with what Jürgen Habermas has called "the project of modernity." Increasingly we live in a multicultural, postmodern world where a variety of views of nationhood are in competition, and the very concept of nationalism has become a matter of lively debate among scholars. It has become even more important—a matter of political life and death—to leaders of nations that are still struggling to establish a sense of national identity, and for whom religious answers to these questions of definition have extraordinary popular appeal.

Seeing Politics in a Religious Way

The second step in the development of ideological religious nationalism is the perception that the problem with politics is, at some level, religious. This means "religionizing" politics, as I described it earlier in this essay, in two ways: by showing that political difficulties have a religious cause, and that religious goals have a political solution. If one looks at politics from a religious perspective, it may appear that secular nationalism has failed because it is, in a sense, religiously inadequate. As one of the leaders of the Iranian revolution put it, secular nationalism is "a kind of religion." He went on to explain that it was not only a religion but one peculiar to the West, a point that was echoed by one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Behind this charge is a certain vision of social reality, one that involves a series of concentric circles. The smallest are families and clans; then come ethnic groups and nations; the largest, and implicitly most important, are religions, in the sense of global civilizations.

Among these are to be found Islam, Buddhism, and what some who hold this view call "Christendom" or "Western civilization" or "Westernism." Particular nations such as Germany, France, and the United States, in this conceptualization, stand as subsets of Christendom/Western civilization; similarly, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, and other nations are subsets of Islamic civilization. From this vantage point, it is both a theological and a political error to suggest that Egypt or Iran should be thrust into a Western frame of reference. In this view of the world, they are intrinsically part of Islamic, not Western, civilization, and it is an act of

imperialism to think of them in any other way. Those who hold this view would solve the problem of secular nationalism by replacing what they regard as an inappropriate religion, "Westernism" with Islam or some other religion related to the local population.

At the same time that religion is solving political problems, politics can help to solve religious ones. In the view of Messianic Zionists such as Dr. Baruch Goldstein and his mentor, Rabbi Meir Kahane, for example, the redemption of the world cannot take place until the Messiah comes, and the Messiah cannot return until the biblical lands including the West Bank—are restored to Jewish control. "Miracles don't just happen," Kahane said in a conversation in Jerusalem a year before he was assassinated in New York City by Muslims associated with Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman's New Jersey mosque. Referring to the return of the Messiah, which he felt could only come after Jews had created the right political conditions, Kahane said, "Miracles are made."

Some Messianic Jews think that the correct conditions for the return of the Messiah include the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple described in the Bible on its original site—now occupied by the Muslim shrine, the Dome of the Rock. Some of these activists have been implicated in plots to blow up the shrine in order to hasten the coming of the Kingdom. One who served time in prison for his part in such a plot said that the rebuilding of the temple was a "national obligation" for the sake of redemption, a political position for which Israel should make "no compromise."

Religious activists who embrace traditions such as Millenarian Christianity and Shiite Islam, which have a strong sense of the historical fulfillment of prophecy, look toward a religious apocalypse that will usher in a new age. The leader of Aum Shinrikyo, borrowing Christian ideas from the sixteenth century French astrologer Nostradamus (Michel de Nostredame), predicted the coming of Armageddon in 1999 in the form of World War III after which the survivors—mostly members of his own movement—would create a new society in the year 2014, led by Aum-trained "saints." Activists in other religious traditions may see a righteous society being established in a less dramatic manner, but even Sunni Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists have articulated a hope for

a political fulfillment of their notions of religious society. They believe that "dharmic society can be established on earth" as one activist Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka put it, by creating a religious state.

Identifying the Enemy

Perceiving politics in a religious way leads to the next step, identifying who or what religious power is at fault when things go wrong. In a religionized view of politics, the root of social and political problems is portrayed in religious terms. An opposition religious group—perhaps a minority group such as the Tamils in Sri Lanka, or the Coptic Christians in Egypt—is sometimes targeted as the corrupting influence in public life. Or the foe of religion may be seen as irreligion—a force opposed to religion altogether. The secular state could fit either of those categories, depending on whether one sees it as the outcome of a "religious" tradition—"Westernism"—or as the handmaiden of those who are opposed to religion in any form. A great many religious activists regard anyone who attempts to curb the influence of religion—for example, by promoting a civil society shaped by secular values—to be opposed to religion. Hence anyone who encourages secularism is, in a sense, a religious foe.

The most extreme form of this way of thinking is satanization. Some members of the Christian militia in the United States refuse to pay taxes in part because they feel that the government is controlled by an evil foreign power. During the early days of the Gulf War in 1991, the Hamas movement issued a communiqué stating that the United States "commands all the forces hostile to Islam and the Muslims" and singled out George Bush, who, it claimed, was not only "the leader of the forces of evil" but also "the chief of the false gods." As this communiqué indicates, this line of reasoning often leads down a slippery slope, for once secular institutions and authorities begin to loom larger than life and take on a satanic luster, the conclusion rushes on that secular enemies are more than mortal foes: they are mythic entities and satanic forces.

Even in 1997, Iranian politicians, without a trace of hyperbole, could describe America as the "Great Satan." This rhetoric first surfaced in Iran during the early stages of the Islamic revolution

when both the Shah and President Carter were referred to as Yazid (in this context an "agent of satan"). "All the problems of Iran" the Ayatollah Khomeini elaborated, are "the work of America." By this he meant not only political and economic problems but also cultural and intellectual ones, fostered by "the preachers they planted in the religious teaching institutions, the agents they employed in the universities, government educational institutions, and publishing houses, and the Orientalists who work in the service of the imperialist states." The vastness and power of such a conspiratorial network could only be explained by its supernatural force.

The Inevitable Confrontation

Once the enemy of religion has been identified, the fourth step follows naturally: the idea of cosmic war. There are parallels in many religious movements to the idea of the coming Armageddon that was feared by both Christian militia members in the United States and members of the Aum Supreme Truth in Japan. Rabbi Meir Kahane, for instance, spoke of God's vengeance against the Gentiles, which began with the humiliation of the pharaoh in the exodus from Egypt more than three thousand years ago and continues in the present with the humiliation of Arab forces that resulted in the creation of Israel and would come to a head in what Kahane expected would be a great struggle against Arabs and other corrupting forces in Israel in the near future. "When the Jews are at war" Kahane said, "God's name is great." Another Israeli activist explained that "God always fights against His enemies" and that militants such as himself "are the instruments of this fight."

Elsewhere I have argued that the language of warfare—fighting and dying for a cause—is appropriate and endemic to the realm of religion. Although it may seem strange that images of destruction often accompany a commitment to realizing a more harmonious form of existence, there is a certain logic at work that makes this conjunction natural. In my view, religion is the language of ultimate order and for that reason provides those who use it with some way of envisioning disorder, especially the ultimate disorder of life: death. Most believers are convinced that death and disorder on an ultimate scale can be encompassed and domesticated.

Ordinarily, religion does this through images projected in myth, symbol, ritual, and legend. The cross in Christianity is not, in the eyes of the faithful, an execution device but a symbol of redemption; similarly, the sword that is a central symbol of both Islam and Sikhism is proudly worn by the most pious members of those faiths not as weapons of death but as symbols of divine power.

Thus violent images are given religious meaning and domesticized. These violent images are usually symbols—such as the cross, or historic battles, or mythical confrontations—but occasionally the image of symbolic violence is not a picture or a play but a real act of violence. The sacrifice of animals and, of course, human sacrifice are examples from ancient traditions. Today conceptual violence can be identified with real acts of political violence, such as firebombings and political assassinations.

These religious acts of political violence, although terribly destructive, are sanitized by virtue of the fact that they are religiously symbolic. They are stripped of their horror by being invested with religious meaning. Those who commit such acts justify and therefore exonerate them because they are part of a religious template that is even larger than myth and history: they are elements of a ritual scenario that makes it possible for people involved in it to experience the drama of cosmic war.

For that reason, it is necessary for the activists who support such acts of terrorism to believe that a confrontation exists, even when it does not appear to, and even when the other side does not seem to provoke it. When one visits Gaza, one can feel a tremendous sense of anticipation among many pro-Hamas activists that the real battle for freedom is yet to come, coupled with a deep disappointment over the superficial freedom resulting from the peace efforts of Yasir Arafat. It was as if the peace that Arafat was entering into had been purchased too cheaply: it had not come as the result of an extraordinary denouement. They expected—perhaps even wanted that eschatological moment of confrontation: some great war that would usher in the beginning of their new age. The suicide attacks carried out by young and remarkably committed Palestinians in the months before and after the January 1996 elections were in some sense attempts to deny the very normalcy that elections imply. It is as if they

wanted to precipitate a confrontation where none had existed, or rather—in their mythologized view of the world—to bring to public attention the fact that an extraordinary war, albeit an invisible one, was raging all around them. Their acts would bring this cosmic confrontation to light.

The Future of Religious Nationalism

In a strange way, the point of all this terrorism and violence is peace. Or rather, it is a view of a peaceful world that will come into being when the cosmic war is over, and when the vision of righteous order held by militant religious nationalists triumphs. The leader of the policy wing of the Palestinian Hamas movement told me that the bombings in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and elsewhere would ultimately "lead to peace." The leader of Japan's Aum Shinrikyo—convicted for his alleged masterminding of the subway nerve gas attack—prophesied that after a colossal global conflict around the year 2000 involving nerve gas and nuclear weapons, a thousand years of peace would be ushered in, led by the coming of a new messiah who would establish a "paradise on earth."

What is common to these and virtually all other "terrorists"—as those of us who experience their shocking violent actions usually regard them—is their self-conception as peacemakers. They are soldiers in a war leading to peace. What they do not agree on, however, is the kind of peaceful world they want to bring about. This difference in political goals is caused not only by a difference in religious backgrounds but by an uncertainty about what form of politics is most appropriate to a religiously defined nation.

Yet the prognosis for peace in a world increasingly filled with religious nationalists is guarded. Ideological religious nationalism is a strident and difficult force in contemporary world affairs. As I have described in this essay, it follows a process that begins with a disaffection with secular nationalism, then moves to perceiving politics in a religious way, identifying mortal enemies as satanic foes, and envisioning the world as caught up in a cosmic confrontation, one that will ultimately lead to a peaceful world order constructed by religious nations. The result of this process is a form of global order radically different from secular versions of globalization, a difference so severe that it could usher in a new

cold war, an ideological confrontation on virtually a global scale.

This process of religionizing politics, however, is still mercifully rare. Most forms of religion do not lead to religious nationalism. The reasons why the process begins and is nurtured are to be found in the social and historical contexts in which it emerges. That is to say that the religionizing process I have described is largely a response to social and political crises. This is certainly the case with the phenomenal growth of religious nationalism in recent years. The common geopolitical crisis experienced throughout the world explains why there have been so many movements of religious nationalism in such disparate religions and places within the last ten years.

In the present period of social turbulence and political confusion—which the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of American economic power have created around the world—it was inevitable that new panaceas would emerge that involved religion, sometimes perceived as the only stable rudder in a swirl of economic and political indirection. Moreover, as nations rejected

the Soviet and American models of nationhood, they turned to their own past, and to their own cultural resources.

Politicized religious movements are the responses of those who feel desperate and desolate in the current geopolitical crisis. The problem that they experience is not with God but with politics, and with their profound perceptions that the moral and ideological pillars of social order have collapsed. Until there is a surer sense of the moral legitimacy of secular nationalism, religious visions of moral order will continue to appear as attractive solutions, and religious activists will continue to attempt to impose these solutions in violent ways, seeing themselves as soldiers in a cosmic drama of political redemption. Can these religious nationalists succeed? Certainly for a time. They may terrify political leaders, shake regimes to their foundations, and even gain the reigns of power in unstable states such as Iran. But it remains to be seen whether nations can long endure with only the intangible benefits that religious solutions provide.