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# **Social Movements, Fundamentalists, and Cosmic Warriors: Three Theories of Religious Activism and Violence**

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### **Abstract**

*This article presents three different causal arguments for religious activism—social movements, fundamentalism, and Cosmic War—and the conditions under which religiously motivated violence occur. These three causal arguments offer a spectrum of goals within religious activism, ranging from challenging social practices and government policies, to defending specific interpretations and practices of the faith, to hastening the apocalypse. Furthermore, each of these theories proposes different ways that religion becomes involved in social, political and religious activism and the conditions under which groups use violence to further their goals. The article concludes by suggesting countermeasures for each type of religious activism.*

In 1994, sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer argued in *The New Cold War?*

*Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* that, despite expectations that religion would retreat further and further from mainstream society and politics to the private lives of individuals, a new era of religious activism, what he calls religious nationalism, is on the rise.<sup>1</sup> Some but not all of this religious activism uses violence as a means of reasserting itself into public life. At its most extreme religious suicide bombers, abortion clinic assassins and *takfir* violence—one Muslim killing another on grounds of apostasy—are examples of religiously motivated violence that appear to be irrational and to have no limits. However, not all religiously motivated violence is that extreme or unyielding; some of it can be for very earthly and rational goals.

Despite Juergensmeyer's prediction of greater religious activism, there is still considerable confusion over the conditions under which religious activism arises, when religious activists turn violent, and the goals for which these groups are fighting. To begin filling this gap, this article presents three different causal arguments for religious activism and the conditions under which religiously motivated violence occur: social movements, fundamentalism, and Cosmic War. These three causal arguments offer a

spectrum of goals within religious activism, ranging from challenging social practices and government policies, to defending specific interpretations and practices of the faith, to hastening the apocalypse. Furthermore, each of these theories proposes different ways that religion becomes involved in social, political and religious activism and the conditions under which groups use violence to further their goals.

The article continues in five parts. The first section describes Social Movement Theory and offers examples of social movements that have used religion to shape, organize, and further their goals. The second section develops a theory of fundamentalism and offers examples of fundamentalist activism. The third section looks at Mark Juergensmeyer's concept of Cosmic War and the conditions under which Cosmic War thinking emerge. The fourth section compares these different lenses and offers key questions for identifying the different types of religious activism. And the fifth section proposes countermeasures for each type of activism.

### **Social movements and religious violence**

Social Movement Theory (SMT) posits the conditions under which grievances, which are plentiful, transform into mass movements aimed at social or political change. McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald offer a particularly useful summary of the theory, including its evolution and its causal logic. The authors describe three variables that scholars of SMT have identified as necessary conditions for social movements to emerge: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes.<sup>2</sup>

The political opportunities variable considers how political constraints and opportunities, particularly institutionalized politics, shape the emergence and success of

social movements. Building off of work by Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and European scholars, the political opportunity variable focuses specifically on how changes in both institutionalized politics and informal groups with political power explain the emergence of social movements.<sup>3</sup> While necessary for understanding social movements, particularly the timing of their emergence, the political opportunity variable is not sufficient for explaining the rise of all movements and particularly their success or failure.

Mobilizing structures, the second variable, are “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal through which people mobilize and engage in collective action.”<sup>4</sup> This variable builds off of two sub theories: resource mobilization theory, which investigates the types of resources available to a group and how they are employed for mobilization; and social movement organizations, or how formal and informal groups and networks facilitate social movements.<sup>5</sup> This variable focuses heavily on the process of mobilization, rather than opportunities, as an explanation for the conditions under which social movements emerge.

The third variable, framing processes, considers the role that narratives and a sense of common purpose play in the formation of social movements and success. David Snow defines framing as “the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action.”<sup>6</sup> This variable includes difficult to measure aspects of social movements such as identity, symbols, cultural values and norms, ideology, and shared meaning. McAdam, McCarthy and Zald contend, “At a minimum people need to feel both aggrieved about some aspect of their lives and optimistic that, acting collectively, they can redress the problem.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, McAdam hypothesizes that “cognitive

liberation,” or the hope that change is possible, is necessary for social movements to emerge and is part of successful framing.<sup>8</sup> Framing processes, in other words, seek to understand how participants in collective action understand the problem and its solution.

Taken together, SMT posits that political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes explain the necessary conditions that transform grievances into activism. As they take shape, social movements are highly visible collectives that aim to mobilize large numbers in order to affect change. Social movements tend to draw on preexisting groups and their networks to mobilize individuals into loosely affiliated collectives. Given their size and loose organizational structure, social movements usually have porous borders and individuals can join and leave the cause with relatively little cost. Framing processes create the conditions through which individuals who join the movement share common meaning and purpose. If done correctly, framing creates a form of collective peer pressure, where individuals feel compelled to join up to be part of experience.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that not all social movements are violent; in fact many successful movements have been purposefully non-violent.<sup>10</sup> When social movements turn violent, it is typically for a few key reasons. First, political opportunities may be blocked, such as changing a policy or a country’s leader through elections. In such cases, violence becomes one of the few remaining tolls for change. Second, social movements may turn to violence if the movement has become frustrated and some of its members feel violence is necessary to realize its goal. Third, violence can also be a tool used to push for negotiations with the opposition. Finally, violence may also be used as a means to draw attention to the cause and inspire recruits.

The goals of social movements are varied. They can range from mobilization to change a specific government policy to revolution. They can also mobilize to challenge social or religious issues within a country or region. Regardless of the goal, social movements typically have specific objectives that draw the attention and support of elites, formal and informal organizations, and large numbers of individuals that agree with that immediate objective. Typically, once a social movement has achieved its goal, it demobilizes.

Religion is a particularly useful tool for social movements, although not a necessary condition for their emergence or success. Sociologist Christian Smith argues that religion can provide both key resources for mobilization and useful tools for framing. Resources include trained, legitimate leaders; preexisting networks, organizational structures and communications channels; and material resources such as money, buildings, schools, and hospitals.<sup>11</sup> Framing resources in religion include a moral framework to which adherents can relate; group cohesion and common identity; symbols and scripture that can be interpreted to justify the cause; and stories of persecution and perseverance that can create fortitude in difficult times.<sup>12</sup>

Several scholars have used SMT to explain the rise of recent social movements around the globe, including those that involve religion. The edited volume *Islamic Activism* highlights the role that Islam has played in fostering social movements, particularly in the Middle East. The volume considers cases where violence has been instrumental to the movement—such as the GIA in Algeria, groups within Egypt, and Hamas in Palestine—and cases where violence has not played a predominant role in mobilization, specifically Saudi Arabia and Turkey.<sup>13</sup> Scholars have also used SMT to

explain the emergence of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (led by a Christian minister, which utilized church networks, and used scripture to justify activism for equality);<sup>14</sup> Polish Solidarity in the 1980s, (led by a union activist, utilized international legitimacy and support from the Catholic church, mobilized various sectors of the population to end Soviet occupation);<sup>15</sup> and the 1979 Iranian Revolution, (led by a cleric, mobilized various groups throughout the country to oust the Shah, and used Islam to justify revolt and frame the solution).<sup>16</sup> More recently, scholars have used SMT to explain the rise of the 2010-2011 Arab Spring, and the different roles that religion played in uprisings throughout several countries, particularly in Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

### **Fundamentalism theory and violence**

Fundamentalism may be the most common form of religious activism today; however, unlike SMT, there is no clearly articulated fundamentalism theory and defining the phenomenon is equally unclear. The term fundamentalism was originally used to explain a new conservative form of Christianity that emerged in the United States in the early 1900, and that formed as a counterpoint to modernism. Therefore, for some, fundamentalism carries an inherently Christian connotation. More broadly the term has come to denote any individual or group that believes in the literal nature of scripture, clear-cut religious practices and beliefs, and the perception that there is an urgent need to get back to basics—the “fundamentals of the faith”—which are being corrupted or have been lost, and to reassert religion into society and, in some cases, political life.

Several scholars note that the term fundamentalism is also problematic because it carries negative connotations, suggesting that fundamentalists are by definition militant,

extremist, irrational, unyielding and even violent.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, rarely do those associated with fundamentalism self-identify as such.<sup>19</sup> However, despite the Christian origins of fundamentalism and its lack of specificity, the term does point to an important trend occurring across religious traditions and a phenomenon that has become entangled with violent action. Therefore, for lack of a better term, a theory of fundamentalism is proposed here.

Building off of several works on fundamentalism, including the authors of the five volume series *Fundamentalism Project*, Mark Juergensmeyer's work in *The New Cold War*, and the ideas of Gabriel Almond and R. Scott Appleby, it is possible to identify the causal logic of fundamentalism and the conditions under which fundamentalist movements turn to violence.

Literature on fundamentalism identifies two triggers in particular. First, fundamentalists react to the rise of secularism. Fundamentalists perceive secularism encroaching on religion and forcing it to the margins of society and political life, which they believe should be governed by religion. Juergensmeyer argues that secularism and fundamentalism (what he calls religious nationalism) are both ideologies, complex systems of beliefs that aspire to shape political and social action. As such, secularism and fundamentalism are in direct competition with one another.<sup>20</sup> For example, "creationists" are a form of Christian fundamentalists who see evolution as false teaching and in direct competition with their beliefs on how the world began. Some creationists feel that their beliefs are being marginalized in public schools and national discourse within the United States, prompting them to push for greater inclusion of the creationist perspective (also

called Intelligent Design) in schools through the courts, or to remove their children from public schools altogether.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to note that, while some within religious groups feel secularism is threatening their faith, not all religious adherents are fundamentalists. The vast majority of those practicing religion do not see secularism as incompatible with faith, and continue to live in a world with secularist and modernist ideals as well as religious beliefs. However, for a minority, the rise of secularism is understood as a threat to the faith, and the need for direct action to prevent the further erosion of religion from public life.

A second distinct trigger of fundamentalism is new interpretations and practices that emerge from within a particular religious tradition and that challenges more conservative understandings of the faith. For example, source criticism—the practice of using historical evidence to identify the sources of scripture in Christianity—ignited conflicts and schisms within several denominations between those that see Christian scriptures as the literal word of God and those that understand it to be divinely inspired, but also the product of humans. Source criticism caused a schism within the Lutheran church in America, creating what became the larger Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which uses source criticism, and several smaller Synods, which do not.<sup>22</sup> More recent examples of new interpretations and practices within religious traditions include ordaining women as clerics, and sanctioning gay marriage. Fundamentalist reactions to new interpretations and practices within a religious tradition aim to prevent what they believe to be false and destructive beliefs and practices from taking hold. This type of fundamentalist response looks more like a civil war within a tradition, rather than a religious reaction against wider society or a government's policies.

Fundamentalists react in at least three distinct ways to the perceived threats from secularism and new interpretations of the faith. First, fundamentalists may choose to isolate themselves from the threat. This course of action could include physically isolating by creating separate communities, or socially isolating the group from wider society by creating parallel institutions, such as schools, clinics, stores, and so on. Isolation is a possible course of action for either threats from secularization or new interpretations within the faith. Second, groups may attempt to change policies or other aspects of governance through political action, including through elections or pressuring the government for change through demonstrations and other means. The previously mentioned debate over teaching creationism in school is an example of groups using political action to change laws in their favor. Third, fundamentalists may choose violence as a course of action in an attempt to push back the perceived threat, either from society or from within the faith. These three courses of action are not mutually exclusive, and groups can change strategies over time or as the perception of threat changes.

The goals of fundamentalists are to return the faith to what they believe is its pristine and correct state. This goal therefore suggests that the faith was practiced correctly at some point in its history—a “golden age”—but that this correct interpretation has been lost or corrupted and there is a need to get back to the fundamentals of the faith. This goal further suggests that fundamentalists believe there is only one right practice (orthopraxy) and belief (orthodoxy) of the faith; all other interpretations are wrong. Furthermore, fundamentalist aim to create clear borders that separate the true and faithful from the misguided and corrupt.

Almond, Appleby and Sivan identify nine characteristics, five ideological and four organizational, associated with fundamentalist movements: reactivity to the marginalization of the faith; selectivity in scripture and practices; moral Manichaenism (dividing the world between right and wrong, good and bad); absolutism and inerrancy of scriptures, beliefs and practices; millennialist thinking; elect and chosen membership; sharp boundaries; authoritarian organizations; and specific behavioral requirements.<sup>23</sup>

These nine characteristics reveal interesting paradoxes in fundamentalist thinking and behavior. Fundamentalists claim to be returning to the pure form of their faith, yet they are selective with scriptures and the practices they emphasize. They reject secularism and claim to be upholding the founding practices of the faith, yet often use modern tools of technology to further their goals, such as computers, the internet and social media. They are millennialist, meaning that they long for life beyond this one, yet are deeply concerned with the world in the here-and-now. These paradoxes make negotiating with fundamentalists more difficult than with social movements, but still possible, as will be discussed in the final section.

Fundamentalism is not unique to one religion; rather it can be found as a particular interpretation across religious traditions. Examples of fundamentalist movements include the Ultra-Orthodox, or *Haredi* within Judaism. The *Haredi* have strict regulations in both practices and beliefs of their Jewish faith. They have chosen to self-segregate into communities of like-minded adherents. In Israel, they have an enclave in Jerusalem, Meir Sharim, which includes its own schools and synagogues. The Haredim traditionally have not served in the Israeli military and, until recently, have eschewed

political participation. They consider the state of Israel a secular abomination that has failed to keep the true tenets of the faith.<sup>24</sup> They do not use violence to further their goals.

The anti-abortion movement in the United States is another example of a fundamentalist movement. While there may be a minority that objects to abortion on non-religious grounds, most protesters see abortion as murder, and believe that it is a religious obligation to intervene to uphold the commandment “thou shall not murder.” Beginning in the 1980s, the anti-abortion movement, especially the Army of God, believed (paradoxically) that violence and even murder was necessary to prevent abortion. The organization carried out clinic bombings and assassinations of clinic doctors and nurses.<sup>25</sup>

A third example of a fundamentalist movement is the *salafi* interpretation of Islam. *Salafi* believe that Islam was at its most pure state during the time of the Prophet Mohammed and, following his death, the leadership of his companions (*Salaf as-Saleh* or “Pious Predecessors”), who knew the Prophet personally and could guide the community by his example. *Salafi* believe that the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet provide a complete guide for Islam today. Wictorowicz summarizes *Salafism* as follows:

Salafis are united by a common religious creed, which provides principles and a method for applying religious beliefs to contemporary issues and problems. This creed revolves around strict adherence to the concept of tawhid (the oneness of God) and ardent rejection of a role for human reason, logic, and desire. Salafis believe that by strictly following the rules and guidance in the Qur’an and Sunna (path or example of the Prophet Muhammad) they eliminate the biases of human subjectivity and self-interest, thereby allowing them to identify the singular truth of God’s commands. From this perspective, there is only one legitimate religious interpretation; Islamic pluralism does not exist.<sup>26</sup>

*Salafism*, therefore, aims return to what they believe was the golden age of Islam, where the faith was correctly understood and practiced. Wictorowicz notes that *Salafi* use different means to realize this goal; most are quietist, eschewing political involvement;

some are “politicos” and work through government (including democracy) to realize their goals or aim to seize the state by other means; and some are jihadis, believing that violence is the necessary path for change.<sup>27</sup>

## **Cosmic War**

Cosmic War, a term coined by sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer, is perhaps the form of activism that is most commonly associated with religious violence. In “Sacrifice and Cosmic War,” Juergensmeyer argues that virtually all of the world’s religious traditions contain scriptures and beliefs that describe divine battles between the forces of Good and Evil and that these battles are struggles to create “ultimate order” and conquer “ultimate disorder,” which is death.<sup>28</sup> For many religions, the culmination of this battle is the belief in the end of times (such as the Apocalypse in Christianity, the End of Days in Judaism, the Last Judgment in Islam, and the arrival of Kalki, the tenth avatar of Vishnu in Hinduism), in which the final battle of Good vs. Evil will occur on this earth, and Good will triumph. The apocalypse is accompanied by clear signs that the end is near and that the faithful must rise up, stand firm in the face of trials and hardship, and defend the faith. Religious adherents may even engage in Cosmic War because they believe that it will hasten the apocalypse, a practice known as “catastrophic Messianism.” Cosmic War occurs when adherents believe that current-day occurrences are signs that the end is here, and that their participation in the Final Battle is necessary. For those who participate in Cosmic War, the promise of salvation and the millennium, a period of peace and harmony, is promised. Juergensmeyer argues that Cosmic War is both deeply personal

and collective—all who participate in it are fighting on behalf of personal and group salvation.<sup>29</sup>

Cosmic War thinking is triggered by acute personal and collective trauma brought about by catastrophic events, or persistent trials. For example, war, occupation, corruption, lawlessness, and natural disasters may lead some to believe that these are signs of the end of times and the war between Good and Evil is occurring in the here-and-now. Under these conditions, earthly battles become spiritual battles in which the faithful must participate. Juergensmeyer posits that holy battles for the conquest of Good over Evil know no specific enemy or definitive goal; rather, the battle is against amorphous disorder. Cosmic War, therefore, does not know incremental goals or compromise.<sup>30</sup>

Political psychologists Robins and Post contend that charismatic leaders provide the necessary interpretation of events and direct followers through this time of calamity, offering hope to the faithful.<sup>31</sup> They argue, “For the followers, such an inspired leader has provided a diagnosis of the ills afflicting the world and has given them a special role to play. He has made sense for them of the surrounding chaos.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, leaders use scriptures and the expectation of the end times to offer an explanation for the suffering and trials of current situations and what individuals should do in order to liberate themselves, spiritually and literally, from these trying circumstances.

Unlike social movements and fundamentalists, violence in Cosmic War is a necessary condition. Cosmic Warriors expect to encounter violent opposition and to meet violence with violence. However, violence is more than just a necessary instrument for achieving Cosmic Warriors’ millennialist goals; it is a sacred and necessary duty that cleanses the world of sin and evil. Furthermore, Cosmic Warriors often depict their

struggle in contradictory terms, that the world must be destroyed in order for it to be saved, or that the war cannot be lost, but may be unwinnable in this lifetime.<sup>33</sup>

Several examples illustrate the complexity of Cosmic War thinking. For example, Pope Urban II called the Christian Crusades in 1095 to aid the Byzantine Empire and liberate Jerusalem from “infidels.” The Pope promised salvation to those who undertook the sacred battle.<sup>34</sup> The First Crusade was supposed to be an organized military expedition, headed by lords from participating countries. However Peter the Hermit, a charismatic French ascetic, heard the Pope’s call and began to raise his own army of commoners bent on hastening the second coming of Jesus and securing their eternal salvation. Answering his call, average citizens marched off to Jerusalem in the spring of 1096 in search of salvation and the second coming of Jesus, slaughtering Jews in the Rhine Valley on their way.<sup>35</sup> Crusading evolved into a sporadic, holy war that drew Europeans in search of fortune, adventure and salvation. At perhaps its greatest extreme, the Children’s Crusade inspired thousands of peasants to walk over the Alps to the sea, where they believed they would be miraculously transported to Jerusalem. Nearly all died in the mountains.<sup>36</sup>

A more recent example of Cosmic War thinking involves the ideology of Aum Shinrikyo. Led by the semi-blind Japanese social outcast Shoko Asahara, the movement aimed to rid the world of impurities by using WMD to start World War III, which would cause massive death and destruction. Asahara promised his followers that they would be miraculously preserved from the battle, or would be reincarnated, and would live to repopulate the earth; in fact he promised paradoxically to save the world by destroying it.<sup>37</sup> In 1995, Aum followers attempted to realize their apocalyptic dreams by deploying

Sarin gas in the Tokyo subway, which they believed would spark World War III. The attacks killed thirteen and wounded hundreds. Asahara and 200 members were convicted for the attacks in 2000 and Asahara has been on death row since that time. At its zenith, Aum Shinrikyo was estimated to have more than 30,000 members around the globe and had succeeded in raising an estimated \$300 million to \$1 billion in cash and assets for its cause.<sup>38</sup>

Some contemporary Islamic activism shows signs of Cosmic War thinking. Current earthly struggles are representations of a much bigger battle between the forces of Good and Evil. These struggles are trials requiring the faithful to rise up and fight in defense of the faith and bring about not only the salvation of the world in the here-and-now but eternal salvation. For example, Sheikh Azzam, Osama Bin Laden's mentor, describes a battle waging between the *dar al Islam* (the Muslim world) and the rest of the world, the *dar al harb*, literally the abode of war, and the need for all Muslims to rise up and defend the faith. In "Martyrs: the Building Block of Nations," Azzam states:

A small group: they are the ones who carry convictions and ambitions. And an even smaller group from this small group, are the ones who flee from the worldly life in order to spread and act upon these ambitions. And an even smaller group from this elite group, are the ones who sacrifice their souls and their blood in order to bring victory to these ambitions and principles... It is not possible to reach glory except by traversing this Path. And glory cannot be architected except by traversing this Path: the Path of the Blessed Jihad.<sup>39</sup>

As will be described, current Islamic activism runs the gamut of social movements, to fundamentalists, to Cosmic Warriors. It is essential to differentiate one type from another because they each carry distinct countermeasures.

### **Comparing the three theories, dynamical change, and key questions**

Social movements, fundamentalists and Cosmic Warriors present a range of conditions under which religious groups engage in activism and use violence to further social, political and religious goals. A brief comparison of the three lenses illustrates the different characteristics of each form of activism.

First, social movements tend to be large in size and are highly visible. They typically are comprised of multiple groups and networks that are united around a specific and limited goal, such as changing a policy, a particular social practice, or (at its most extreme) revolution. Once achieved, the movement usually breaks up and groups continue to act on their own agendas. Social movements draw on various resources to mobilize and organize participants, including material resources, networks, narratives, symbols, and other forms of communication. Participants in social movements may be highly motivated but, due to their size, individuals may come and go with relative ease. Historically, social movements have had a charismatic leader who helps to unify different groups, provide inspiration, and direct participants towards a specific goal. However, recent examples of social movements, particularly in the Arab Spring uprisings, suggest that social movements may not need charismatic leaders to form or prosper. Religion provides useful resources to social movements, such as leadership, networks, moral legitimacy, material resources, and unifying symbols. Violence, if used at all, is an instrument that furthers the movement's goals.

Fundamentalists emerge in response to two perceived or actual threats to the faith: secularism, which threatens to erode religion from public life; and new interpretations within the faith, which threaten more traditional understandings of the religion. Fundamentalists aim to create clear distinctions between the faithful and the rest by

reinforcing specific beliefs and practices (orthodoxism and orthopraxis), which they claim to be the original, pure and true practice of the faith. Despite describing their actions in terms of authenticity, fundamentalists are usually selective with their use of scripture, symbols, practices and history. Fundamentalists do not accept multiple interpretations of the faith, nor is debate welcome; there is only one correct understanding, which they possess. Fundamentalists choose different means for reinforcing and defending their interpretation of the faith, including isolation, political activism and violence. When violence is used, it is a means for realizing the group's goals.

Cosmic Warriors believe that current calamities are signs that the end of times are near, and that it is incumbent on all the faithful to rise up and fight on behalf of God. In some cases, Cosmic Warriors aim to foster “apocalyptic messianism,”—to create the conditions for the end of times, such as wars, mass famine, and destruction—which will be followed by a new era of peace and prosperity. Cosmic Warriors are usually few in number and highly committed; their presence initially may not be visible to wider society. Typically, Cosmic Warriors mobilize around a charismatic leader who helps to make sense of the chaos and directs the faithful in the right course of action. Cosmic Warriors believe that violence is not only necessary to bring about cataclysmic change, but that it is a sacred duty and will help to cleanse the world of sin and pave the way for the millennium. Self-sacrifice and martyrdom, giving one's life for the cause, are necessary actions that will help realize the promise of salvation.

The conditions that lead to social movements, fundamentalism and Cosmic War are summarized in Table 1.

In theory, these three causal arguments for religious activism are distinct but, in practice, they are less clear and groups may contain elements of more than one type. For example, social movements may use Cosmic War imagery and thinking to mobilize segments of the population. The Ayatollah Khomeini drew on the promise of the return of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam—a messianic leader that Shias believe will restore justice in the world—to mobilize the population against the shah. This tactic helped create one of the largest mass protests of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.1 Three Lenses of Religious Activism

Type	Goal	Size	Leadership and structure	Members	Use of Religion	Violence
<b>Social Movements</b>	Specific and limited	Large Highly visible	Charismatic leader, Possibly leaderless	Loose affiliation Porous borders	Mobilization Legitimacy Framing (not necessary)	Instrument (not necessary)
<b>Fundamentalists</b>	Limited but less specific	Small to large with clear borders	Charismatic leader, authoritarian	Committed	Religion is the core issue (orthodoxy and orthopraxy)	Instrument (not necessary)
<b>Cosmic Warriors</b>	Vague and conflating spiritual with earthly	Small, can be clandestine	Charismatic leader, prophetic	Highly committed	Apocalypse and millennium	Necessary Sacred duty

Groups may also change over time and according to shifts in political circumstances, frustrations within a group, or unfulfilled prophecies. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, has the distinctly fundamentalist goals of realizing what they believe to be the correct interpretation of the faith and to reject new innovations in Muslim thinking. However, the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in Egypt, has also sought to create a social movement with the aim of bringing all Muslims “back” to the

faith. The Muslim Brotherhood has also widened its scope by running for office, which requires mobilizing mass support in the form of votes and, if elected, require compromise and working with secular and other religious groups.

A group may also become frustrated with their progress, which could cause it to shift from one type of activism to another. For example, fundamentalists who are unable to persuade those within their faith of their beliefs and practices, and who may actually be losing supporters, could turn to Cosmic War thinking to explain their trials as a sign of the apocalypse and to stay the course. Fundamentalists who isolate themselves may move towards paranoia, which could also fuel Cosmic War thinking and justify violence and martyrdom.

Several key questions can help identify the different causal paths of social movements, fundamentalism and Cosmic War.

First, what does victory look like to the group or movement? In other words, what are the goals for which the group is fighting? Social movements typically have specific and limited goals, such as changing a policy, and victory is measured by the degree to which these goals are met. Fundamentalists may also have specific goals, such as to preserve what they believe to be the correct interpretation of the faith, but these goals are significantly broader than changing a policy or even a head of state. Victory for a fundamentalist, therefore, is less clear than for social movements. Cosmic Warriors' goals transcend this world to include fostering the conditions of the apocalypse and the hope of salvation.

Within the question of the group's goals, it is also important to consider both what the group says and what it does, which offers interesting clues about a group and its

organization. Specifically, do rhetoric and actions mirror each other, or not? For example, around the time of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Al Qaeda's senior leadership expressed frustration over the affiliate Al Qaeda in Iraq's brutal tactics and high casualty rates among Iraqi civilians, which was driving the population away from the movement. The senior leadership, in other words, wanted to win large segments of the population over to their movement, but the actions of their affiliate were losing support among the people.<sup>40</sup> This disconnect between the rhetoric and goals of senior leaders, and the goals and actions of their subordinates, suggests that organizational control was not tight with Al Qaeda at this time, and that there were disagreements between what Stout calls the "strategists" and the "foot soldiers."<sup>41</sup> This disconnect offers opportunities for countermeasures, which will be discussed below.

Second, who are the leaders and followers? Leadership will most likely look different depending on the type of group. Social movements require leaders that various segments of society see as legitimate to successfully foster mass mobilization. If religion is involved, social movements will most likely draw from well-known religious leaders from within the clergy. Examples of these leaders include Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the U.S. Civil Rights movement, Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu in the anti-apartheid movement, and the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership in the Iranian revolution. Fundamentalist leaders may come from within the established religious leadership, or may be from outside the leadership and in direct opposition to it. The U.S. anti-abortion initiative drew from ordained ministers from a variety of Christian denominations. However, the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership is not typically from the trained Islamic leadership (the Ulama) in Egypt, and stands in direct criticism of what

they see as the Ulama's failed leadership. Cosmic Warriors also tend to have leaders that are not part of the trained clergy and therefore cannot easily be censured by religious hierarchy. Prior to the start of the First Crusade in 1096, Peter the Hermit—a self-proclaimed religious leader—whipped up popular sentiment for the Crusade, promising the second coming of Jesus and salvation for its participants. His legitimacy stemmed from his charisma and believed connection to the divine, not his ties to the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

Social movements will likely have a wide array of participants from a variety of groups all unified around a common purpose, such as changing a policy or ousting a country's leader. Adherents within a fundamentalist movement will look much more uniform and will likely conform to a clear-cut and rigid set of beliefs and practices. Cosmic Warriors tend to be relatively few in number and highly committed. Cosmic Warriors may keep their group hidden from mainstream society as they fight to bring about the conditions of the apocalypse.

Also within this question, it is important to ask if leaders and followers want the same thing. Primary documents from Al Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks suggest that the senior leadership wanted to create a social movement aimed at bringing the entire Muslim world to what they believed to be the correct interpretation of the faith. However, some rank and file were joining the movement with the desire to hasten the apocalypse and earn salvation for themselves and their family. This disconnect between leaders and followers created problems for organizational unity and purpose.

Third, it is important to ask: What does the group's organization look like? Each of these types of religious activism has different organizational structures. Social

movements tend to be open and porous; participants can come or go from the movement and it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell how many are part of the movement once it takes root and grows within the population. Furthermore, social movements can be relatively flat structures, as was the case in the Arab Spring, or could be composed of a multitude of smaller hierarchical organizations that are only loosely affiliated to one another. Fundamentalist groups tend to be closed movements with clear distinctions of who is in and who is out, along with authoritative leadership and hierarchy. This type of organizational structure creates the necessary control over beliefs and behavior. Cosmic Warriors also tend to have closed organizations with hierarchy to impose control over its followers. But Cosmic War thinking can spin out of control and leaders can lose control over their followers, as was the case with Peter the Hermit and the People's Crusade and some of Al Qaeda's Cosmic War thinking and martyrdom operations that have killed more Muslims than foreigners.

These three principle questions for identifying religious activism—the goals, the leaders and followers, and the organizational structure of the group—are important for formulating countermeasures for containing violent religious activism. As the composition, tactics, and goals of social movements, fundamentalists, and Cosmic Warriors vary, so do countermeasures against these groups.

### **Countermeasures in religiously motivated violence**

Not all religious activism requires measures aimed at countering its effects; some religious activism has goals that are productive to society and governance. The U.S. Civil Rights movement, the anti-Apartheid movement, and Gandhi's Quit India movement are

all examples of religious activism that have spurred societies to become more just and equitable. Therefore, the first consideration when confronted with religious activism should be the goals for which the movement is fighting and the extent to which these goals promote greater liberty to all within a society, country or region. If they do, then measures aimed at countering the movement are most likely unnecessary.

However, not all religious activism serves the greater good and much of it does require a reaction from the state. Therefore, countermeasures for each of the three variants are proposed below.

Social movements tend to have specific and limited goals; therefore countermeasures should focus on negotiation and compromise between the state and the movement. Negotiations and compromise could allow for the state and the movement to come to common ground and understanding, specifically on goals relating to changing a policy or practice. For social movements that aim to oust a leader or change a government, compromise on either side is unlikely, given the objective. However, negotiations could help facilitate a peaceful change of leadership, depending on the nature of the state.

If popular, embedded in society, and viewed as legitimate, the state's use of violence to counter a social movement may be counterproductive, especially if the movement is focused on upending the regime. The state's use of violence to counter a social movement, therefore, has a limited but potentially useful role. The state could use the threat of violence or its actual employment to bring the movement to the negotiation table or keep it from leaving. It could also use force to contain fringe movements bent on

using terrorist tactics or other forms of violence to further the cause. Overall, however, the state's use of state violence to counter social movements should be minimal.

Fundamentalists are highly reactionary, particularly to perceived or actual threats to their understanding of the faith. Overall, the goal in confronting fundamentalism should be to prevent the group from further radicalizing, and to bring it back into a more mainstream understanding of the religion. Therefore, countermeasures should focus on reducing the sense of threat these groups feel. One approach states could employ to reducing fundamentalists' sense of threat is to give the group space to retreat and practice their interpretation of the faith. For example, the 2002 school voucher program in the No Child Left Behind Act made it easier for parents to opt out of public education and use their tax dollars to pay for enrollment in private schools or home schooling. Although controversial, this piece of legislation gave creationists space to adhere to their beliefs and practices.<sup>42</sup> However, if the state were to employ this approach, it would be necessary to monitor the group for signs of further radicalization, which could occur if isolated.

Perhaps even more so than with social movements, the use of force as a countermeasure against fundamentalists has severe limitations; using force against a group that has a heightened sense of threat would most likely exacerbate these anxieties. Force could be useful to contain or eliminate groups that have become severely isolated and pose a threat to wider society, but this approach would most likely be useful under the direst of circumstances. Space, monitoring, and the use of law enforcement to contain fundamentalists and reduce their sense of threat is a better approach.

Finally, Cosmic Warriors require special countermeasures and perhaps are the most difficult group for states to neutralize. Unlike social movements and fundamentalists, all Cosmic Warriors who direct their violence outside the group are a threat to wider society. Furthermore, Cosmic Warriors anticipate confrontation and trials; it is written into their expectations of the apocalypse. Therefore directly confronting Cosmic Warriors, especially with force, could feed their ideology and potentially grow the movement. Juergensmeyer argues that Cosmic War has two solutions: the first is the total defeat of the group, the second is “redirecting the mythology,” or challenging the group’s interpretation of the faith.<sup>43</sup> With Juergensmeyer’s second solution, Cosmic War zeal could be reduced by sparking a debate within a religious tradition over the immanency of the apocalypse. A debate over this interpretation throws into question the inerrancy of the leader and his views, which opens the door for an adjustment of the ideology. For example, the Saudi government has helped facilitate an internet chat room that draws jihadis into a debate with rehabilitated terrorists about the religious necessity and justification of their actions.<sup>44</sup> The idea is to get potential recruits and those within the organization to question the ideology. Within this approach, it is important that the state does not engage the group directly in a theological debate, because the state is most likely seen as illegitimate and incapable of having a theological discussion. Similarly, using the religion’s mainstream clergy may be counterproductive because Cosmic Warriors often stand in critique of clergy for failing to see the signs of the apocalypse. Rather, much can be gained from engaging former Cosmic Warriors that have had a change of heart, as has been done in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and London.<sup>45</sup> In this case, the messenger is as important as the message.

The use of force as a potential countermeasure to Cosmic Warriors has a limited, but useful role. Force could be used to go after a group that is small, isolated, and contained. In this case, the state's use of force would most likely fulfill Cosmic Warriors' ideology, but wider society would not be in agreement with this ideology, and therefore would not join the group. Similarly, force could be used to take out a Cosmic Warrior's leader if the group's organization is well understood and the state has an understanding of how that would affect the group. Cosmic War may be driven solely by a charismatic leader, and removing that leader would end the threat.

Finally, it is worth noting that, in the case of Islamically motivated Cosmic War, the Arab Spring stands as a sharp critique to its apocalyptic worldview. The Arab Spring erupted in several countries to demand the right of citizens to choose their government leaders, for greater liberties such as freedom of speech and assembly, and for a civil society independent from governmental interference. In other words, the Arab Spring has demanded rights that are more in line with western forms of democracy than apocalyptic visions of final judgment. This is good news for the ideological battle against Cosmic War thinking. If true, then Arab masses within several states have spoken and they are not in a Cosmic War mindset. Their rejection of this worldview will go a long way in countering its potential threat.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer's, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> McAdam, et al, pp. 2-3. See also: Sidney Tarrow, "States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements," in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 41-61.

<sup>4</sup> McAdam, et al, p. 3.

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<sup>5</sup> McAdam, et al, p. 3-4. See also: John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (May, 1977), pp. 1212-1241.

<sup>6</sup> As quoted in McAdam, et al, p.6. See also: Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26 (2000), pp. 611-639.

<sup>7</sup> McAdam, et al, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> McAdam, et al, pp. 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> As suggested by Tina Rosenberg, *Join the Club: How Peer Pressure Can Transform the World*, New York: Norton, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, Fourth U.S. Edition, Boston: The Albert Einstein Institution, 2010, pp. 1-7. Sharp argues that mass movements should be non-violent to successfully affect change because violence prevents the necessary development of social and political institutions that will aid in the successful transition of the state from dictator to democracy.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Smith, "Correcting a Curious Neglect, or Bringing Religion Back In," in Christian Smith (ed.), *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 1-28.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, "Correcting a Curious Neglect," pp. 9-13, 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, edited by Quintan Victorowicz, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004. See also: Asaf Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (2005), pp. 891-908.

<sup>14</sup> Aldon Morris, "The Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement: The SCLC as the Decentralized, Radical Arm of the Black Church," in Christian Smith (ed.), *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 29-48.

<sup>15</sup> Maryjane Osa, "Pastoral Mobilization and Contention: The Religious Foundations of the Solidarity Movement in Poland," in Christian Smith (ed.), *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 67-86.

<sup>16</sup> M.M. Salehi, "Radical Islamic Insurgency in the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979," in Christian Smith (ed.), *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 47-66.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example: Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi (eds.), *Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond*, Washington, DC: American University in Cairo Press, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Juergensmeyer, *New Cold War*, pp.4-5.

<sup>19</sup> John Esposito, *Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* New York; Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 7-8; Juergensmeyer, *New Cold War?*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>20</sup> Juergensmeyer, *New Cold War*, pp. 30-35.

<sup>21</sup> Amy J. Binder, *Contentious Curricula: Afrocentrism and Creationism in American Public Schools*, 2002: Princeton University Press.

<sup>22</sup> "Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," Edward L. Queen II, Stephen R. Prothero, Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr.(eds.), *Encyclopedia of American Religious History, Volume 1*, Third Edition, New York: Facts on File, 2009, pp. 592-594.

<sup>23</sup> Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 93-98.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the *Haredim*, see Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1988.

<sup>25</sup> Jennifer Jefferis, *Armed For Life: The Army of God and Anti-Abortion Terror in the United States*, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Third Edition, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 19-29; Christopher Hewitt, *Understanding Terrorism in the America: From the Klan to Al Qaeda*, New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 38-40.

<sup>26</sup> Quintan Victorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, 2006, pp. 207-239. Quote taken from p. 207.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

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- <sup>28</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, "Sacrifice and Cosmic War," in Mark Juergensmeyer (ed.), *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*, New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 106-111. This theory is further developed in chapter two of Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?*
- <sup>29</sup> Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 156.
- <sup>30</sup> Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 148.
- <sup>31</sup> Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 113-114.
- <sup>32</sup> Robins and Post, pp. 114-115.
- <sup>33</sup> Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 149-153.
- <sup>34</sup> "Urban II: Speech at Claremont 1095 (Robert the Monk Version)," James Harvey Robinson, ed., *Readings in European History: Vol. I*, Boston: Ginn and Co., 1904, pp. 312-316, available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/urban2a.html>, as of June 4, 2012.
- <sup>35</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1996, p. 272; Thomas F. Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999, pp. 18-20.
- <sup>36</sup> Gary Dickson, "Stephen of Cloyes, Philip Augustus, and the Children's Crusade of 1212," *Journey Towards God: Pilgrimage and Crusade*, edited by Barbara N. Sargent-Bauer, Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1992, pp. 83-105.
- <sup>37</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence and the New Global Terrorism*, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1999; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 103-116.
- <sup>38</sup> Robins and Post, pp. 133-135.
- <sup>39</sup> Abdullah Azzam, "Martyrs: The Building Block of Nations," *Relioscope*, [http://www.relioscope.com/info/doc/jihad/azzam\\_martyrs.htm](http://www.relioscope.com/info/doc/jihad/azzam_martyrs.htm), as of June 6, 2012.
- <sup>40</sup> Mark E. Stout, et al., *The Terrorist Perspectives Project: Strategic and Operational Views of Al Qaida and Associated Movements*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008, p. 48.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Scott Keeter, "On Darwin's 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Americans Still Divided About Evolution," *Pew Research Center for People and the Press*, February 5, 2009, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1107/polling-evolution-creationism>, as of June 25, 2012.
- <sup>43</sup> Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 163.
- <sup>44</sup> Y. Yehoshua, "Reeducation of Extremists in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Research Institute*, No. 260, January 18, 2006.
- <sup>45</sup> See, for example: Lawrence Right, "The Rebellion Within: An Al Qaeda Mastermind Questions Terrorism," *New Yorker*, June 2, 2008; "Jihadists and 'the Narrative,'" *60 Minutes*, April 25, 2010, <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=6430933n>, as of June 25, 2012.