

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE



COUNTERTERRORIST CENTER

TERRORISM REVIEW

NOVEMBER 1995

DI TR 95-011



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Aum Shinrikyo: Threat to US Interests?

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Articles in the Japanese press have speculated that Aum Shinrikyo had planned to assassinate President Clinton and/or to attack US interests in Japan

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Aum fugitives who may have stashes of chemical agents pose the greatest danger to the Japanese population.

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Anti-US Propaganda

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Aum Shinrikyo portrayed the United States as an enemy of the Japanese people to reinforce cult leader Shoko Asahara's preaching of nuclear Armageddon and an impending military conflict between Japan and the United States. Asahara's claims that he and his people already had been the victims of gas attacks by US military aircraft were intended not only to reinforce his assertion that the United States is an enemy, but also to divert attention from Aum's sarin laboratory from which leaking gas had been suspected. The cult leader sought to use anti-US propaganda as a plausible ruse to hide his plans to take over the Japanese Government.

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The Japanese press has carried stories of threats by Aum Shinrikyo to US facilities or President Clinton, but these are speculative and do not appear to be supported by documentary information. For example, an

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article in *Shukan Gendai*, reportedly a sensationalist weekly, claims that "the cult... secretly had put together a plan to assassinate US President Clinton come what may." Among the "evidence" cited to support this claim is a reference to security countermeasures in Washington, with the inference that Washington believed Aum followers were planning to use sarin against the President. The article also cites a passage in the cult's periodical *Vajrayana Sacca* in January 1995 that "it would not be strange" if Clinton were assassinated.

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Until the five Aum fugitives are captured, the threat of a retaliatory attack cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, Aum's past behavior suggests that Japanese rather than Americans would be the most likely targets. Events such as the APEC summit, for example, which commanded extra attention and security, could provide enough of a distraction so that surviving Aum members could mount an attack elsewhere in Japan.

The *Shukan Gendai* article also raises the possibility of Aum "linking up" with other anti-American groups to "carry out the deed."

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