Leadership is a concept essential to a full understanding of the politics of terror. An important characteristic of leaders of social movements utilizing political violence and bent on transformative change, including millenarian movements, is a profound sensitivity to the present conditions of society and to the unique needs and desires of their potential followers.\(^1\) The millenarian leader comes to define their role as that of the creator, communicator, and overseer of a radical, new political program, which is frequently inadequately defined and without bounds, but nevertheless grabs the attention of group members because it so effectively resonates with their expectations and aspirations.\(^2\)

As a result, in order to understand the relationship between millenarianism and terrorist group leadership, we must carefully look, not only at the unique individuals involved but, more importantly, at the sources of hope, identity, and collectively held values within societies that engender such movements.

The study of leadership remains controversial. For example, empirical research that has focused attention on such factors as distinct personality traits of individuals as the active independent variable in effective leadership have had limited results. Such narrowly defined characteristics have been found to be much less important than first believed. More recent studies have tended to focus attention not on the characteristics of the leader but, rather, on the specific situation or set of events that appear to set the stage for effective leadership to occur. In other words, under what conditions do leaders gain their salience and effectiveness? Leadership, it is assumed, depends largely on the ability of the leader to react in such a manner that allows him or her to quickly alter their behavior to cope with emergent dynamic or complex situations.
Ultimately, the influence of any leader is most significantly dependent upon the particular cultural narrative that he or she communicates or actually personifies to the receiving audience. Rather than relating a litany of facts or boring, didactic recaps of the problems that exist within a group or society, in a communication process that merely confirms what virtually everyone is already aware, effective leaders present a vigorous, lifelike, and perceptual vision that resonates on the same wavelength (to use an electronic metaphor) as that of the audience. In this way, the effective leader speaks to the audience in a jargon and language that is easily understood, molds to their cultural imagery, and engages them in three important steps.

He or she must reconfirm the fundamental values of the society, by reminding the audience of who they are (identity) and why they have important meaning and value (transcendence).

Leaders must construct a workable solution to problems out of the cultural material available exclusively within that society. Indeed, this cultural material is far more important to their success than any unique or exceptional personal characteristics or qualities that they may possess. Such a workable solution requires linking the past with not only present conditions, but also, an idealized future, when problems will be effectively pushed aside.

Finally, the leader must mobilize society for action. However, this must be accomplished on terms dictated by the audience, not by the leader, and he or she must be fully cognizant of that fact from the beginning. Premature action can be incomplete and ineffective, whereas action that is too late can be fatal. Timing is of utmost importance to the leader.

The audience is not merely an impassive receptor in this process. They are not simply going to listen and follow the first would-be leader who shares his or her dynamic crusade for change. On the contrary, members of a group or society arrive fully equipped with a variety of optional and available cultural narratives. These have gained salience by being told and retold over an extended period of time within the family, community, village, and town. The message of the potential leader, whether it is conventional or radical, must be able to effectively contend with these other, preexisting tales. If the new message is to achieve any degree of success, it must somehow come to supplant, balance, supplement, harmonize, and, indeed, prevail over the earlier narratives.

Leadership necessitates three essential components: one who will guide the way forward, a willing group of followers, and an end state that they wish to achieve. Indeed, it is the goal of the movement that