Religious Leaders: Peacemakers or Warmongers?

WASHINGTON, DC—Civil war and conflict within countries is the most prevalent threat to peace and security in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. A pivotal factor in the escalation of tensions to open conflict is the role of religious elites in exacerbating tensions along identity lines by giving the ideological justification, moral reasoning, and call to violence. *Between Terror and Tolerance* examines the varied roles of religious leaders in societies deeply divided by ethnic, racial, or religious conflict. The chapters in this book explore cases where religious leaders have justified or catalyzed violence along identity lines, and other instances where they have played a critical role in easing tensions or even laying the foundation for peace and reconciliation.

This volume features thematic chapters on the linkages between religion, nationalism, and intolerance, transnational intra-faith conflict in the Shi’a-Sunni divide, and country case studies of societal divisions or conflicts in Egypt, Israel and Palestine, Kashmir, Lebanon, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Tajikistan. These cases explore how religious leaders in divided societies interpret the relationships among religious doctrines and human rights; define exclusive and inclusive national identities; articulate the connections among religion, state control, and state policy; rhetorically justify and/or mobilize for war; and ameliorate or mediate conflict.

*Between Terror and Tolerance* concludes by exploring the book’s findings and their implications for policies and programs of international non-governmental organizations that seek to encourage and enhance the capacity of religious leaders to play a constructive role in conflict resolution. *Between Terror and Tolerance* strives to find the path to a less violent world and answers some crucial questions: Under what conditions do religious leaders justify or catalyze violence along identity lines? And under what conditions do religious leaders lay the foundation, advocate, and sometimes directly mediate for peace?

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