

## Terror In The Name Of God: Why Religious Militants Kill

By Jessica Stern

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### For God's Sake

By Ahmed Rashid

What do an American Christian anti-abortionist, an Israeli zealot wanting to rebuild the great Jewish temple in Jerusalem and a Pakistani jihadi, or holy warrior, fighting in Kashmir have in common? They all interpret their religion in an extreme manner, which leads them to bomb and murder, according to a new book by terrorism specialist Jessica Stern. Stern is a former member of the National Security Council in the Clinton administration, a lecturer at Harvard University and one of the foremost American experts on terrorism.

Stern's dissection of Islamic extremism in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, comes as an important reminder that all the world's great religions have produced extremist groups. Martyrdom and dramatic acts of violence were practised and admired by the early Christians and Jews resisting the Roman Empire 2,500 years ago. Stern's book is based on hours of interviews with Muslim jihadis and with Christian and Jewish "jihadis," too. These provide much of the book's fascinating detail. Combined with her experience in policymaking, Stern has a complete grasp of all the disciplines needed for sound analysis. However, Stern was clearly faced with structural problems: Should it be an academic treatise or a readable book that the public could access easily? Her approach is a kind of halfway house which more or less succeeds. There is no lack of anecdotes or detail, but readers might feel that her editors have sometimes chopped her insightful analysis too closely.

Stern looks first at religious terrorism from the perspective of individuals: How they are recruited and the spiritual or emotional awakening they undergo. One of the most fascinating accounts is that of Kerry Noble, a self-anointed elder of a United States-based Christian cult who makes up his own version of Christianity. By starting off with his story, Stern makes readers fully appreciate that the U.S. has its own share of extremists. In the Islamic world, she meets leaders from Indonesia's Lashkar Jihad, Pakistani groups fighting in Kashmir, and Palestinians. She explores Jewish extremist groups in Israel who are motivated by the same kind of extremist interpretation of their religion. Stern also looks at how terrorist leaders organize their movements and how they have reacted to a worldwide crackdown on their activities. Her encounters are described with utter frankness. In Pakistan she informs people that she herself is Jewish. For many of the extremists, she is the first Jew they've ever met. Stern's conclusions are suitably frightening. "Today's multinational terrorist leader is an entrepreneur who brings together mission, money and market share. He hires skilled and unskilled labour and often pays competitive rates," she writes. Like officials of non-government agencies, terrorist leaders meet with donors and governments, raise money and win converts through the Internet. They carry out security measures that equal or better those of state intelligence agencies. Stern's inside account of the extremist mindset brings a rare immediacy to the problem.

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