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EXPERTS EXAMINE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF MUSLIM RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN SOUTH ASIA

Seattle, WA - In a new report, "Who Speaks for Islam? Muslim Grassroots Leaders and Popular Preachers in South Asia," The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) **offers a unique inventory of religious leadership in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.** As Peter Mandaville highlights in the foreword, the majority of Muslims worldwide, including 46% in Pakistan, turn first to local Islamic leaders for religious guidance. To understand "who speaks for Islam," we need to pay attention to the local voices shaping Muslim world-views.

In "**Media-Based Preachers and the Creation of New Muslim Publics in Pakistan,**" Mumtaz Ahmad highlights the increasing popularity of non-traditional Islamic leaders among previously alienated audiences. Significantly, through their use of new media, these leaders are spreading their influence among the middle classes and educated women within Pakistan, and Pakistanis in Europe and North America.

In "**Muslim Grassroots Leaders in India: National Issues and Local Leadership,**" Dietrich Reetz speaks to the importance of local dynamics influencing religious authority among India's diverse Muslim population. The orientation of local Muslim initiatives – e.g. Muslim NGOs, welfare organizations, and political parties – in states such as Assam, Tamil Nadu, and Jammu and Kashmir are shaped by state level politics and society. The rising fame of voices such as Salafi-oriented Zakir Naik, and his target audience of a religiously-resurgent rising urban middle-class, is significant. Similar middle-class religiosity among India's majority Hindu population helped the ascent of the Hindu-nationalist forces of the BJP in the 1990s.

Thomas H. Johnson's essay, "**Religious Figures, Insurgency, and Jihad in Southern Afghanistan,**" argues that political and military strategies aimed at countering the Taliban insurgency that ignore the insurgency's religious foundations and the complex dynamics of religious authority that insurgent – and counter-insurgent – groups exert at the local level, are unlikely to succeed.

Mumtaz Ahmad is a Professor in Hampton University's Department of Political Science. Dietrich Reetz is a Senior Research Fellow at the Zentrum Moderner Orient and Senior Lecturer of Political Science at the Free University Berlin. Thomas H. Johnson is a faculty member of the National Security Affairs Department of the Naval Postgraduate School as well as the Director of the Program for Culture and Conflict Studies.

Download a copy of the report at www.nbr.org.

To request an interview with the authors or for more information please contact media@nbr.org.

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