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# **Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Divine Justice, and Personal Responsibility Towards Peace Building in the Context of Romans 12:18 and Micah 6:8,**

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## **Abstract**

In his now famous teachings on the Mount of Olives called '*the beatitude*' among many things Jesus said, 'Blessed are peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God' (Matthew 5:9). In Isaiah 2:4, the Bible says, 'they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nations, neither shall they learn war anymore.' In Matthew 18:21-22, the bible says, 'then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times. The need for a suitable lexical, morphological, and syntactical context for the reading of Romans 12:18 and Micah 6:8 that informs a correct hermeneutical theory is critical and urgent. An engaging contextual exegetical study of Romans 12:18 and Micah 6:8 divine justice, forgiveness and reconciliation and people responsibility towards peace building decrypt a framework that outlines both the urgency and imperativeness of a hermeneutics of peace and peaceful coexistence and people responsibility towards peace building. This article attempts an exegetical comparative study of Romans 12:18 and Micah 6:8, divine justice, forgiveness and reconciliation and people responsibility towards peace building. It demonstrates how Romans 12:18 and Micah 6:8 commands responsibility of

people towards justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace building

**Keywords:** *divine justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, peacebuilding, war, peace.*

## **Introduction**

Almost 80 million people can be considered refugees fleeing from their countries because of the lack of peace surrounding their homes. Ideal society needs to be built by mankind, a society that is spiritually beautiful, materially affluent, and humanly rewarding. It can only be possible if there is peace and security of the world. The importance of peace for any society is obvious. Without peace no nation and no individual can develop. Only in a peaceful environment that nations and people can secure greater achievements. There remains a fundamental challenge to the modern world: can conflicts between man and his social groups be resolved in some fashion other than war? Scientists have unleashed the power of atom but are powerless to check their danger for humanity. According to Abu-Nimer<sup>1</sup> peace and security is an essential element of human life. A peaceful and secure environment is imperative to every society since it affects economic and social development and is a necessary *sin-qua non* to the realization of human rights. Peace is the yearning of every heart, the hope of every nation, the message of every religious tradition and prayer. Where war destroys and tears apart, peace builds, strengthens and restores<sup>2</sup>. Christianity as a phenomenon and applied has influenced human life and actions for many years. The lives of many a people have been organised and ordered around its doctrines and teachings. This article is an attempt to do a parallel comparative exegetical study of Romans 12:8

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<sup>1</sup> Abu-Nimer, Mohammed, ed. (2001) *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books,

<sup>2</sup> Ackermann, Alice. (1994) *Reconciliation as a Peace-Building Process in Postwar Europe: The Franco-German Case*. *Peace & Change* 19, no. 3, 229-250.

and Micah 6:8 on the subjects of divine justice, forgiveness and reconciliation; and people responsibility towards peace building.

### **Christianity and Wars of the world**

According to the Encyclopaedia of Wars<sup>3</sup>, out of the 1,763 conflicts of the world, 123 or 6.98% had religion as their cause. In his book, 'the great big book of horrible things,' White<sup>4</sup> gives religion as the cause of 11 of the world's 100 deadliest atrocities. This includes the crusades<sup>5</sup> which were series of military expeditions, beginning in the late 11th century, organized, supported, and sometimes directed by the Church in the medieval period in response to Muslim wars of expansion. Their objectives were to check the spread of Islam, to retake control of the Holy Land in the eastern Mediterranean, to conquer pagan areas, and to recapture formerly Christian territories. In recent times, arguments have arisen over the extent to which religion, politics, economics, or ethnicity and tribalism predominate in so-called wars attributed to religion. Omar and Duffey<sup>6</sup> argues that instead of religion, often ethnic hostilities and tribalism have driven much of the conflicts. William<sup>7</sup> argue that what is termed 'religious wars' is a largely 'Western dichotomy' and a modern invention from the past, arguing that all wars that are classed

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<sup>3</sup> Axelrod, Alan; Phillips, Charles, eds. (2004). Encyclopaedia of Wars (Vol.3). Facts on File. pp. 1484–1485 "Religious wars".

<sup>4</sup> Matthew White (2011). The Great Big Book of Horrible Things. W.W. Norton & Company. p. 544. See also Andrew Holt, Ph.D. Religion and the 100 Worst Atrocities in History. <https://apholt.com/2018/11/08/religion-and-the-100-worst-atrocities-in-history/>

<sup>5</sup> The term "crusade" first referred to military expeditions undertaken by European Christians in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries to the Holy Land.

<sup>6</sup> Omar, Irfan; Duffey, Michael, eds. (22 June 2015). "Introduction". Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions. Wiley-Blackwell. p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cavanaugh, William T. (2009). The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

as 'religious' have secular (economic or political) ramifications. The statement attributed to Jesus in Matthew 10:34-35 (BSB), 'Do not assume that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law' has been interpreted as a call to arms for Christians.

Juergensmeyer<sup>8</sup> argues that, 'despite its central tenets of love and peace, Christianity, like most traditions, has always had a violent side. According to Ellerbe<sup>9</sup> the Christian church has left a legacy, a worldview that has permeated Western society, both secular and religious. A legacy that has created sexism, racism, and intolerance of difference. In early Old Testament times war was often seen as a holy war, a conflict initiated and led by God. Such a war was declared by God Himself (Exodus 17:16; Numbers 31:1-3, 1 Samuel 15:1-3), and every facet of war had religious significance. Sacrificial rites were performed to ensure God's continued support (1 Samuel 7:8-10; 13:9). The sacred ark of the covenant, symbolizing the presence of God, was often taken into battle (1 Samuel 4:3). Later in Israel's history, the prophets began to see the terror of war as God's judgment against his people for their sins, and the glory of war faded (Habakkuk 1:5-11, Jeremiah 21:3-7). Israel began to look to the day when the endless cycle of war would be broken: The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Isaiah 2:3-4).

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer (2004). *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. University of California Press.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen Ellerbe, (1995) *the Dark Side of Christian History*, Morningstar and Lark, USA

In the New Testament, war is universally seen as evil and Jesus emphasized peace instead. He advised us to avoid retaliation and revenge and to extend our love even to our enemies. "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.' (Matthew 5:38-45) The apostle Paul and other New Testament writers echoed Jesus' sentiment and expanded it. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

### **Romans 12:18 and Micah 6:8 in theological perspective**

**Romans 12:18 (NIV):** If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

### **ΠΡΟΣ ΡΩΜΑΙΟΥΣ 12:18 Greek NT: Nestle 1904**

εἰ δυνατόν, τὸ ἐξ ὑμῶν μετὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων εἰρηνεύοντες·

The Epistle to the Romans is the longest of Apostle Paul's epistles and is regarded by many people as his greatest. It contains his most complete explanation of the doctrine of

justification by faith in Jesus Christ rather than by the performances of the law of Moses. It contains many teachings about the doctrines of salvation and the practical application of those doctrines to daily life. It was written to the church in Rome. The Roman church was a group that had a large Jewish element, but was also filled with Gentile converts from paganism, both free as well as slaves. The theme of the book centres on the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16,17). Paul is deeply concerned that his readers understand how a sinner may be received as righteous by a righteous God; and how a justified sinner should live daily to the glory of God. The book falls neatly into an introduction (1:1-17), a doctrinal section on justification (1:18-5:11), a doctrinal section on sanctification (5:12-8:39), a parenthetical section on Israel (9:1-11:36), a practical application section (12:1-15:13); and then a conclusion (15:14-16:27). In Romans 12:18 the Apostle made one of the most important statements, 'If it is possible on your part, live at peace with everyone.' The interpretation of these two texts (Romans 12:18 and Micah 6:8) have given rise to various hermeneutical ambiguities

Often people have hid behind a deprivative ontology of textual ambiguities to juxtapose a biasness towards certain selfish agenda at the expense of proper basis of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics of a textual critical methodology. Romans is primarily a work of doctrine, divided into four sections: righteousness needed (1:18-3:20); righteousness provided (3:21-8:39); righteousness vindicated (9:1-11:36) and righteousness practiced (12:1-15:13). It talks about God, who He is and what He has done. It tells us of Jesus Christ, what His death accomplished, what we were like without Christ and who we become after trusting in Christ. In Romans, 12:18 Paul advised the Church, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Carefully consider what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible on your part, live at peace with everyone. Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written: "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the

Lord.” In this text Pauls, exhorts the individual to look within himself whenever there was the need to respond to a situation that demands a respond, knowing very well that the individual Christian is admonished to live like Jesus and imitate him in words and deed. He goes on to say that, ‘do not avenge yourselves.’ In this approach, not only is he asking Christians to let the strength in their dependence on God and the influence of his word make them avoid situations that would bring conflict or friction but also demonstrate that they have a God that intervenes in their situations to ensure that they are at peace.

Romans 12:18 acknowledges that sometimes relationships in our lives can affect peace and create hostility. It recognizes that while we cannot control everything, we should try our best to seek peace. For instance, you cannot control someone else’s anger or vitriol, but you can control yourself. By controlling our words, our actions, and our conduct, we can encourage peace rather than discord. For example, as believers, we should purposely avoid provoking strife or fighting. When we are hurting, it can be tempting to stir up a crowd or react in the heat of the moment. Instead, we should choose to seek peace in disagreements. We must model our faith by forgiving others as Christ forgave us (Ephesians 5:1-2). What better way to live in peace than to forgive others (Matthew 18:21-22) Forgiveness not only demonstrates our understanding of Christ’s sacrifice for us, but it also prevents us from growing hostile or holding grudges. When you choose not to forgive, you harden your heart. And, it is hard to feel at peace when you are harbouring bitterness and hate. Instead, we should strive to live as Ephesians 4:31-32 (KJV) commands “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, outcry and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and tenderhearted to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you”.

**Micah 6:8:** He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

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שְׁמַעוּ-נָא אֶת אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אָמַר קוֹם. רִיב אֶת-הַהָרִים וְתִשְׁמַעְנָה הַגְּבָעוֹת ק

Micah on the other hand like Isaiah, the book has a vision of the punishment of Israel and creation of a "remnant", followed by world peace centered on Zion under the leadership of a new Davidic monarch; the people should do justice, turn to Yahweh, and await the end of their punishment. The book addresses the future of Judah/Israel after the Babylonian exile. Micah announces that God's justice is coming in order to create a new future of love and faithfulness on the other side of Israel's sin and exile. The book describes God's coming judgment on Israel because of its rebellion. The book also gives the people hope. Like a shepherd, God will one day gather and restore a faithful remnant to the land. He will rebuild Jerusalem, defeat evil forever, set a Messianic King to rule over the people and bless all the nations. Micah 6:8 states categorically, "He has shown you, O man, what is good and what does the LORD require of you but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Prior to the rhetorics of Micah 6:8. Micah outlined certain actions in verse 6 through 7 as a supposed criterion for right standing with God and acceptance, he asked, "With what shall I come before the LORD when I bow before the God on high? Should I come to Him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? Would the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He then concludes that, none of those are sufficient to achieve a right standing and acceptance by God unless people are ready to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.



## **Divine justice, forgiveness and reconciliation**

One of the highest and unrivalled attributes, powers, or energies of God is justice. God provides His creatures with impartiality according to their needs for their orderly performance and formation. God sustains and holds the universe in two ways. Divine justice administers the necessary providence to each being so that it succeeds in the purpose for which it was created. In this way nature is held in equilibrium. Christianity, Judaism and Islam, all teach that God will reward or punish people for following or breaking the moral tenets of their respective holy scriptures. Since this judgment comes from a supreme and omniscient authority, all three religions argue that, it constitutes an absolute and divine form of justice. Christianity teaches that divine justice (judgment) is a single act on the part of God. The concept of God, as a perfect being necessitates the perfection of his justice. Justice is action in accordance with the requirements of some law. Whether these laws are grounded in human consensus or societal norms, they are supposed to ensure that all members of society receive fair treatment. There are different types and concepts of justice including distributive, procedural, retributive, and restorative. While distributive justice is concerned with giving all members of society a "fair share" of the benefits and resources available, procedural justice is concerned with making and implementing decisions according to fair processes that ensure "fair treatment."

Retributive justice on the other hand appeals to the notion that people deserve to be treated in the same way they treat others. It is an approach that justifies punishment as a response to past wrongdoing. Scriptures inform us that God is supremely good, merciful, and just and that divine justice is the highest law there is. The action of divine justice in human consciousness and experience destroys sin and frees the individual to express his or her true nature as God's spiritual likeness. Divine justice is defined as the constant and unchanging will of God to give everyone what is due him or

her. Two scripture narratives summarise God's nature of justice Exodus 33:19 and Deut 5:9-10

“I will cause all My goodness to pass before you,” the LORD replied, “and I will proclaim My name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

..... for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on their children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing loving devotion to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

In numbers 14:18 (BSB) the two texts (Ex 33:19 and Deut 5:9-10) are put together in a single statement that tells the nature of God as just. Numbers 14:18 (BSB) ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in loving devotion, forgiving iniquity and transgression. Yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished; He will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generation.’ The Bible commands that we must always forgive people their wrongs against us no matter how great the offense. We have always sinned against God more than others have sinned against us, and since God offers his forgiveness regardless of our offenses, he expects us to do the same (Matthew 18:21-35). Psychologists<sup>10</sup> generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness. While there is some debate over whether true forgiveness requires positive feelings toward the offender, experts agree that it at least involves letting go of deeply held negative

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen, Cynthia (2005) Creative Approaches to Reconciliation. In The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace, edited by M. Fitzduff and C.E. Stout, Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group,

feelings.<sup>11</sup> In that way, it empowers you to recognize the pain you suffered without letting that pain define you, enabling you to heal and move on with your life. Forgiveness is often the basis of reconciliation, the restoration of right relationship.<sup>12</sup> The act that hurt or offended you might always be with you, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on you and help free you from the control of the person who harmed you.

Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you. Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting or excusing the harm done to you or making up with the person who caused the harm.<sup>13</sup> Forgiveness brings a kind of peace that helps you go on with life. What prevents peace and justice from flourishing in our world? Too often, the answer is “a lack of forgiveness” and “a refusal to reconcile.” Many of us acknowledge this lack and unwillingness in our own personal relationships as well. It's often the little things we let build up; the hurts, resentments and grudges, the attitudes and patterns we have practiced for so long they become habit, and keep us from loving freely and fully. Being hurt by someone, particularly someone you love and trust, can cause anger, sadness and confusion. If you dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, vengeance and hostility can take root. If you allow negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice.

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<sup>11</sup> Cose, Ellis (2004) *Bone to Pick: Of Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Reparation, and Revenge*. New York: Atria Books,

<sup>12</sup> McGregor, Lorna (2006). *Reconciliation: I Know It When I See It*. *Contemporary Justice Review* 9, no. 2: 155-174.

<sup>13</sup> Cose, Ellis (2004) *Bone to Pick: Of Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Reparation, and Revenge*. New York: Atria Books,.

## **Personal Responsibility towards peace building**

One of the striking quotes about people responsibility is from Martin Luther King Jnr<sup>14</sup>

“Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding: it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.”

In as much as there are certain prevalent external factors such as may be cultural, social, religious, political and economic that exert negative energies creating conducive environment for escalating hostility or conflicts, the responsibility of the individual to maintain peace and avoid conflict is paramount.<sup>15</sup> It is important to build both human skill and resource capability to restrain and trifle hostilities and antagonisms where and when necessary before they reach an uncontrollably escalated level. Often the factors that create dissensions and aggressions are intentionally avoided or ignored until they have sparked the intolerable consequences. Even though conflict is identified as a normal part of relationships, there are ways to avoid it by using techniques to defuse tension such as not bringing up controversial issues, postponing a difficult conversation, or using humour or by becoming more aware of your emotions and the emotions of other people. Peace is when people are able to resolve their conflicts without violence and can work together to improve

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. – Nobel Lecture. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2022. Thu. 24 Mar 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Hein, Laura and Mark Selden (2000) *The Lessons of War, Global Power, and Social Change*. In *Censoring History*, edited by Laura Hein and Mark Selden. Armonk, NY: Sharpe,

the quality of their lives.<sup>16</sup> But peacebuilding is about dealing with the reasons why people fight in the first place and supporting societies to manage their differences and conflicts without resorting to violence. It aims to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of violence, so can take place before, during and after conflicts.<sup>17</sup> It is a long-term and collaborative process, as it involves changes in attitudes, behaviours and norms. Importantly, peacebuilding is done collaboratively, at local, national, regional and international levels. Individuals, communities, civil society organisations, governments, regional bodies and the private sector all play a role in building peace.

According to Vermon<sup>18</sup> peacebuilding describes the myriad methods employed by people all over the world to improve prospects for peace. Peacebuilding includes a wide range of initiatives, from mediation, protection, reintegration, trauma healing and reconciliation, through to longer-term investments in fairer access to governance, education, health, justice, security and livelihoods. Transforming relationships is key to putting an end to violence. That means understanding and dealing with why people are fighting in the first place, and finding ways of moving things forward. This is true whether the conflict is within communities, between societies, or between the state and ordinary people. Peacebuilding is the development of constructive personal, group, and political relationships across ethnic, religious, class, national, and racial boundaries. It aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent

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<sup>16</sup> Hancock, Landon (2002). Reconciliation and Justice as Prerequisites for Peace-Building. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 8, no. 3: 291-293.

<sup>17</sup> Hatay, Ann-Sofi Jakobsson (2005) *Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia 1995-2004*. Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research,

<sup>18</sup> Phil Vernon, (2019) 'Redressing the Balance: Why We Need More Peacebuilding in an Increasingly Uncertain World', *International Alert*, 2017; Peace Direct and Inclusive Peace Transition Initiative, 'Civil Society & Inclusive Peace: Key Insights and Lessons from a Global Consultation Convened on Peace Insight',

ways and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict. Peacebuilding can include conflict prevention; conflict management; conflict resolution and transformation, and post-conflict reconciliation.<sup>19</sup> Peacebuilding becomes strategic when it works over the long run and at all levels of society to establish and sustain relationships among people locally and globally. Strategic peacebuilding connects people and groups 'on the ground' with policymakers and powerbrokers. It aims not only to resolve conflicts, but to build societies, institutions, policies, and relationships that are better able to sustain peace and justice

## **Conclusion**

To-day the world is working for the establishment of peace; and this will come to pass as the individual takes upon himself the task of becoming an apostle of peace. Nations are learning the futility of making war upon one another, so the present is a favourable opportunity not only to work together for world peace, but to test our sincerity. Christendom is seeking to lay aside all prejudice, - political, social, national, and international, - and in the spirit of the Christ to labour together for the emancipation of mankind from the horrors of war. Jesus, that great apostle of peace, conquered by love; and it is love alone that can conquer the hearts of mankind to-day, the love that is willing to forget differences in race, in colour, and in speech. The sincere Christian Scientist finds that he is gradually being freed from former wrong ideals of life, - social, national, and international, - and is enabled to press forward with certainty of ultimate success in bringing about true unity among men. We learn through the teachings of Christ Jesus that unity is spiritual, not material, and that it can never be perfected through material methods.

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<sup>19</sup> Lederach, John Paul (1998) *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press,

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