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## Welcome from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume IX, Issue 4 (August 2015) of *Perspectives on Terrorism* at [www.terrorismanalysts.com](http://www.terrorismanalysts.com). Our free online journal is a joint publication of the *Terrorism Research Initiative* (TRI), headquartered in Vienna (Austria), and the *Center for Terrorism and Security Studies* (CTSS), at the Lowell Campus of the University of Massachusetts (United States).

Now in its ninth year, *Perspectives on Terrorism* has over 5,200 regular subscribers and many more occasional readers and visitors worldwide. The *Articles* of its six annual issues are fully peer-reviewed by external referees while its *Policy Briefs* and other content are subject to internal editorial quality control.

This special double issue is devoted entirely to the so-called Islamic State (IS), presenting 14 research articles on various aspects of the organization, in addition to an extensive, specially compiled bibliography on IS. The articles are products of a conference on IS held in Oslo on 11-12 June 2015. The conference was organized by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) and funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it brought together leading specialists on IS, jihadism, and civil war along with senior policymakers and government analysts from several countries.

The motivation for the conference – and for this special issue – was that our understanding of IS is lagging behind the group's battlefield advances. After a wave of studies on al-Qaida in Iraq in the mid-2000s, the academic community largely dropped the ball on the group's later incarnations ISI and ISIS until it burst onto the global stage last summer with the capture of Mosul. The past year has seen a substantial intellectual catch-up effort, not unlike that mounted for al-Qaida in the early 2000s, but we still have a long way to go.

The articles cover a broad range of topics and questions pertaining to IS as an organization. All of the articles were completed in July 2015 and are therefore unusually up-to-date as far as academic publishing goes.

The issue opens with two articles (by Charles Lister and Thomas Hegghammer/Petter Nesser) that address two of the most pressing questions today, namely, how is the military campaign against IS going, and how much of a terrorist threat to the West does IS pose?

The following three papers place IS in a historical and comparative perspective. Brynjar Lia looks at IS as the latest in a decades-long series of jihadi state-building efforts, Stathis Kalyvas asks what the comparative study of rebel groups can tell us about IS, while Truls Tønnessen examines the relationship between IS and its historical predecessors.

We then move on to ideology and propaganda with J.M. Berger's article on social media and millenarian beliefs, Iain Edgar's study of the night dreams of IS fighters, Aaron Zelin's analysis of one week of IS propaganda, and Joas Wagemaker's study of the concept of *bay'a* (allegiance) in IS's ideology.

The next three articles are concerned with how IS operates. Scott Gates and Sukanya Podder ask how IS deals with the organizational challenges that come with having many foreign fighters, Aymenn al-Tamimi presents a detailed analysis of the IS administration and bureaucracy, and Kirk Sowell takes a detailed look at IS's military and political operations in Ramadi and Fallujah.

The last two articles speak to the question of whether containment is a viable alternative strategy against IS. Jamie Hansen-Lewis and Jacob Shapiro evaluates the long-term sustainability of the IS economy, while Clint Watts evaluates and pros and cons of a strict containment approach.

The final item in this issue is a comprehensive bibliography of IS compiled by Judith Tinnes. We are confident that these contributions will be of interest and use to scholars and policymakers seeking to understand the Islamic State. Also, please see the position announcement at the end of this issue from UMass Lowell, where they are searching for a new Professor and Director of the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies.

The issue was prepared by guest editor Thomas Hegghammer, Director of Terrorism Research at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), and co-editor Prof. James Forest, Director of Security Studies at UMass Lowell. The next issue (October 2015) will be prepared by editor-in-chief Prof. em. Alex P. Schmid.