

Welcome from the Editors

This Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* is devoted to al-Qaida (AQ). It contains 15 articles on various aspects of al-Qaida and its affiliates, as well as an extensive bibliography on AQ. The articles are products of a conference held in Oslo on 4-5 September 2017. The conference was organised by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It brought together leading specialists on al-Qaida and the Middle East, along with senior policymakers and government analysts from Norway and other countries.

The rationale behind organising this conference – and for reproducing the proceedings in this Special Issue – was the feeling that there is a certain lack of knowledge of how al-Qaida has evolved, especially since Osama bin Laden's death in 2011, the 'Arab Spring', and the rise of the Islamic State (IS). In recent years, most of the world's attention has been on IS, while al-Qaida has seemingly disappeared from the radar. However, since IS experienced serious setbacks on the battlefield in 2017, the question asked by many today is whether al-Qaida will take its place on the world stage in one form or another.

An additional motivation for having an al-Qaida conference in 2017 was to mark the fact that it is now thirty years since al-Qaida was established – counting from the year 1987, when Osama bin Laden set up a training camp for Arabs in Afghanistan which later became known as *al-Qa'ida* ("the Base"). FFI thought it was appropriate to gather al-Qaida experts from around the world, 'old hands' as well as promising newcomers to the field, to assess the current status of our knowledge on al-Qaida.

This Special Issue is divided into two parts. Articles in the first part covers general questions related to al-Qaida's history and its recent status, while the second part covers case studies of countries and regions where al-Qaida or its affiliates have been active.

Anne Stenersen – the Guest Editor of this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* – opens the series of articles by summarising what we know about al-Qaida today, but also suggests a framework for a better understanding of al-Qaida's role in international jihadist terrorism. Leah Farrall revisits al-Qaida's foundation and early history, arguing convincingly that al-Qaida was founded in 1987 and not in 1988 as commonly believed. Then, Don Ressler examines al-Qaida's historical relationship to the Harakat movement in Pakistan, suggesting that we are only now beginning to understand the extent of these links.

Jerome Drevon identifies al-Qaida's place in the larger Jihadi Social Movement and analyses the recent competition between al-Qaida and Islamic State. Tore Hamming continues in the same track by providing a detailed analysis of how the intra-movement competition between AQ and IS has influenced their respective targeting preferences. Donald Holbrook explores the extent to which al-Qaida's propaganda materials have featured in UK terrorism investigations.

The next two articles address the topic of technology. Truls Tønnessen looks at how terrorist groups have used – but also, failed to use – new technologies in recent years while Geoffrey Chapman analyses why some jihadi groups in Syria, but not others, have used chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war.

The remaining articles focus on country and regional issues. The first three texts in this section are dedicated to Syria, which continues to be the most important arena for jihad today. Charles Lister, Aymenn al-Tamimi and Sam Heller analyse al-Qaida's main affiliate in Syria, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham - formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra - discussing its shifting allegiances and its relationship to al-Qaida's core. These three articles are followed by a case study on Jordan, where Kirk Sowell examines the government's recent attempt to "de-jihadise" the country's school curricula.

The last three articles explore the conglomerate of jihadi groups in North and West Africa. Jean-Pierre Filiu's focus is on al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, while Jacob Zenn examines the historical influence of al-Qaida in the north of Nigeria. Finally, Rhiannon Smith and Jason Pack explain the complexities of the Libyan case.

The final, AQ-related item in this journal issue is a bibliography on al-Qaida and its affiliates, compiled by

Judith Tinnes. This Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* has been prepared by Guest Editor Dr. Anne Stenersen (FFI, Oslo), with the assistance of Associate Editor Dr. John Morrison and the Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Alex P. Schmid.