

Dear Readers,

Preserving that which is worth preserving does not mean cementing the status quo. Anyone seeking to preserve something valuable in the long term must improve it cautiously, yet continuously. This applies as equally to politics as it does to a publication such as International Reports (IR), which is presenting itself in a new form in this issue. This new design goes hand in hand with a number of other innovations, including a change to a quarterly publication cycle of the print version, an even greater focus on themes, as well as a step-by-step expansion of the online presence. All of this represents an adaptation to fundamentally changing reading habits, without losing sight of what has ensured the success of IR for more than 30 years: in-depth analyses on foreign, security and development policy.

The latest attacks in Brussels have sadly only been the most recent of several instances over several months underscoring the topicality of the theme of this, the first issue in the new design, “Globalisation of Terrorism”. If any further proof had been required, the murderous attacks in Brussels and Paris have been painful reminders that the threat, which security agencies had been warning of for some time, has become anything but an abstract concept through the involvement of so-called foreign terrorist fighters. In her article for this issue, Kristina Eichhorst investigates not only the causes of the phenomenon but also the question of the most promising ways for Germany and Europe to overcome the threat posed by returnees from the war zones in Iraq and Syria.

Foreign terrorist fighters are by no means a phenomenon restricted to Europe. As Edmund Ratka and Marie-Christine Roux illustrate in their article, many of those who have joined the international jihad originate from Tunisia. This is particularly sobering as there have also been some distinct positive developments towards democratic change apparent in Tunisia since the so-called Arab Spring. The two authors explain the extent to which this change is being jeopardised by the marginalisation and radicalisation of a younger generation that feels excluded from economic, social and political life, but also the extent to which hope still remains.

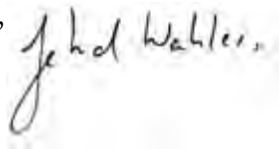
Large numbers of the foreign fighters, whether they originate from Europe, Tunisia or other countries, are currently drawn to Syria and Iraq, where the so-called Islamic State (IS) has developed from a local actor into a threat of global significance over the last few years. In his article, Malte Gaier discusses the complexity of the current conflict situation in the Levant and the enormity of the challenge for the international community to check IS and stabilise the region.

In their article, Bakary Sambe and Benedikt Seemann examine two terror organisations that have pledged allegiance to IS in the past, Boko Haram and Abu Sayyaf, although it is not clear how close the links truly are or whether the declarations may have been pure propaganda. While Boko Haram has only been in existence for a few years, during which it has drawn attention through unspeakable cruelty, the origins of the Abu Sayyaf group goes back over two decades. In this context, the example of Abu Sayyaf shows how thin the line is between religiously motivated terrorism and “pure” crime – a phenomenon that is also at the center of Louise Shelley’s article, among other reasons because it illustrates why the fight against terrorism funding requires a multi-pronged strategy.

In conclusion, one crucial insight gained from the articles on the theme of this IR issue is that we shall only retain our freedom if we avoid clinging to the status quo in our efforts to fight global terror – be it measures for improving internal security, for fighting terrorism funding or for integrating people who have come to our country fleeing from terror and war – and make continuous improvements in these areas as well.

I wish you a stimulating read.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gerhard Wahlers', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Dr. Gerhard Wahlers is Editor of International Reports, Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Department European and International Cooperation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (gerhard.wahlers@kas.de).