The meteoric expansion of the ISIS movement in Iraq, Syria and beyond during the past year has led to numerous, often conflicting interpretations of this phenomenon and its seeming success, as well as divergent perspectives on its prospects and future.

The workshop, “Understanding the ISIS Phenomenon”, to be jointly convened by the Arab Studies Institute and the Issam Faris Center of the American University of Beirut on 28 July 2015, seeks to promote and provide a multi-dimensional, inter-disciplinary examination of its subject.

The purpose of this workshop is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Islamic State phenomenon, both in terms of the contextual factors that have produced it; its territorial, organizational, political, socio-economic, and religious-theological features; the extent of continuity and change with respect to other Islamist and particularly other radical Jihadi movements; and informed discussion on its further trajectory.

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Papers and Presentations

Mouin Rabbani ((Arab Studies Institute)
ISIS: Research and Policy Agenda

Bassam Haddad (Arab Studies Institute and George Mason University)
How Not to Study ISIS

Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)
Cloning Saddam: Understanding ISIS

Oraib Rantawi (Al-Quds Centre for Political Studies)
The Development of Organized Salafi Jihadism, its Deployment in Regional Struggles, and the Failure of the Contemporary Arab Nation State: Three Entry Points to Understanding the Emergence of ISIS

Abu Ibrahi Raqqawi (Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, via skype)
ISIS and the Virtual War on Social Media

As'ad Abu-Khalil (University of California – Stanislaus)
The Study of ISIS and the Role of Islam

Rim Turkmani (London School of Economics)
ISIS and the War Economy in Syria

Rami Khoury (American University of Beirut)
Battalions of Discontent, Despair and Directionlessness: The many motivations for joining or backing ISIS

Maher Esber (Developmental Interaction Network)
How Islamist Discourse penetrated the Syrian Uprisings: Understanding the Emergence of ISIS

Yasar Qatarneh (The Arab Initiative for Conflict Transformation)
ISIS: Positioning Radicalism on the Map of Contemporary Ideologies, or Positioning Ideology on the Map of Contemporary Radicalism?

Nabih Boulos (Los Angeles Times)
ISIS's Bureaucratic and Administrative Trappings

Basileus Zeno (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)
More than Mere stones: Archeological Sites under ISIS

Ziad Ali (Princeton University)
Isis in Tikrit: Invasion, Occupation and Legacy

Publications: Publication of official report forthcoming and will be followed by working papers in preparation for publication in a Journal or a book manuscript, pending final versions. Essays will also be featured electronically on various platforms with wide circulation.