In this report:

1. The State of the Union.
2. Recap: ISA 2015 in New Orleans
3. What to Expect at ISA 2016 in Atlanta
4. Important: Agenda for the Business Meeting
5. Other Announcements

1. The State of the Union

Our section is now completing its third year as an ISA section. As of November 2015, we boast 245 members. That number is likely to rise drastically as the annual conference nears but it already represents a 13% growth in membership compared to last year. We are now the 22nd largest section (out of 32 ISA sections) in terms of membership. Our membership goal is 300 scholars by ISA 2017. Our account balance as of November 2015 is $3228.09.

2. Recap: ISA 2015 in New Orleans

Last year’s ISA convention in New Orleans was our second chance to host panels. Through the efforts of our program chair, Nukhet Sandal, we managed to co-sponsor 17 panels (up from 8 at the prior convention), including panels on religion and foreign policy, human rights, secularism, violence, the Middle East, and many more. These panels were extraordinarily well attended.

Our reception was equally popular. It was sponsored by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs (Georgetown University) and the journal Review of Faith and International Affairs. Some 100 members joined to eat, drink and celebrate our achievements as a new section.

We handed out our first “Best Graduate Student Paper Award” to Jason Klocek (U.C. Berkeley), who was selected by a committee headed by Jocelyne Cesari, our awards chair. We also hosted our first Distinguished Scholar panel, honoring Dr. Douglas Johnston.

3. What to Expect at ISA 2016 in Atlanta

Impressive as our panels were in New Orleans, our program chair outdid herself further for the 2016 convention. We were allotted 14 panel slots but will be co-sponsoring 26 panels! We are delighted to sponsor a range of religion and IR panels that is representative of our rapidly growing membership.
In addition to panels, we will be holding our business meeting on Friday, March 18, from 12:30-1:30 in Room 214 at the Hilton. Our reception will take place later on the same day, Friday, March 18, from 6:45-8 PM in Salon B at the Hilton. As usual, our reception will feature great food and outstanding company. We recruited three sponsors for our reception: The Religion and Politics Program (U.C. Berkeley), the journal *Review of Faith & International Affairs*, and Cornell University Press. We would like to thank them in advance for their generosity. And we very much look forward to seeing all of you at the reception.

In addition to the business meeting and the reception, we will be hosting our first working group, organized by our vice-chair, Nukhet Sandal, and our communications chair, Turan Kayaoglu. The title of the working group is “Religion and Peace: Possibilities, Challenges and Prospects”. It is co-sponsored by the Peace Studies section and features panels and discussions prior to, during and after the convention.

This convention also offers our first opportunity to present an award for the best book on religion and IR. A committee, headed by Deina Abdelkader (Harvard University), selected two co-recipients for the award. They are Amy Reynolds, for her book *Free Trade and Faithful Globalization: Saving the Market* (Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics); and Avi Max Spiegel, for his book *Young Islam: The New Politics of Religion in Morocco and the Arab World* (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics).

The winner of our graduate student paper award is Tanya Schwarz (U.C. Irvine) for her paper “Interfaith Development and Humanitarianism”. Vendulka Kubalkova (Miami) was the chair of that committee. We would like to thank all committee members for their hard work.

The distinguished scholar honored at the 2016 convention will be Dr. Jeffrey Haynes (London Metropolitan University). We are hosting a distinguished scholar panel in his honor on Friday, March 18, from 4 PM – 5:45 PM.

### 4. Important: Agenda for the Business Meeting

We have three important items on the agenda for our business meeting so far:

A. Elections:

The executive committee that formed our section was formally voted into office at the annual convention in Toronto in 2014. Per our charter, both our chair and our vice-chair/program-chair serve for two years prior to reelection. So the first item on our agenda at the business meeting in Atlanta will be to vote for a new section chair and for a new section vice-chair/program-chair.

Please let me know if you would like to run for either of these offices. Our current vice-chair/program chair, Nukhet Sandal (Ohio), has already announced her intention of running for the position of section chair. Our current secretary, Larry Rubin (Georgia Tech), has announced
his intention of running for the position of vice-chair/program-chair. Neither of these nominations should discourage others from competing for these positions.

If Larry Rubin is elected vice-chair/program-chair, we will need a new secretary for our section. Peter Henne (Vermont) has expressed interest in that position but, as before, others are encouraged to throw their name into the hat.

B. Selecting Distinguished Scholars

So far, we’ve selected two distinguished scholars to be honored at special panels and at our annual reception, Douglas Johnston (2015) and Jeffrey Haynes (2016). Both were chosen by the executive committee, by consensus. We would like to institute a more formal process for selecting distinguished scholars and we propose forming an annual committee for that purpose, to be established by the awards chair.

C. Clarifying Book and Paper Award Criteria

At the urging of the committees that selected this year’s best graduate student paper and best book, we would like to draft some language that defines more clearly which submissions are eligible to be considered for these awards and which criteria should be employed in assessing the most deserving submissions. That language should not bind future committees but it would be helpful if we could offer some guidelines for the future in terms of relative emphasis: How much do we value originality, breadth, methodological sophistication, contemporary relevance, contributions by junior scholars, etc.

Please let me know as soon as possible (hassner@berkeley.edu) if you would like to propose additional items for discussion at the business meeting.

5. Other Announcements

A. Two great opportunities for those of you working on book manuscripts: Cornell University Press and Rowman & Littlefield are both launching new book series on religion. The Cornell series will be called “Religion and Conflict” and will be edited by Ron Hassner (U.C. Berkeley). The Rowman & Littlefield series will be called “Critical Perspectives on Religion in International Politics” and will be edited by Giorgio Shani (International Christian University) and Mustapha Pasha (Aberystwyth).

B. Patrick James (USC) and Davis Brown (Maryville) would like to announce the release of the Religious Characteristics of States (RCS) dataset. This is the largest and most comprehensive dataset on religious demographics of its kind. It covers 202 states and 20 selected non-state entities from 2010 back centuries, often before the state is even independent. It reports populations and percentages of adherents of 88 religious denominations and categories, for a total of about 6.7 million datapoints. Phase I of the dataset, demographics, is available for download at http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/BROWN.asp.
C. Please join the section’s facebook page (88 of our members have already done so): (https://www.facebook.com/groups/336226026577855/). This is one of the easiest ways for us to share announcements and news. Alternatively, you can email announcements to relandir@uw.edu
We look forward to seeing you all again in Atlanta in March!

Drafted, on behalf of the executive committee, by:

Ron E. Hassner

Chair, Religion and IR Section