

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER

2019 – 2020

RESEARCH & ACTIVITIES PORTFOLIO

AT A GLANCE:

Over the past year, BIC developed the scope and depth of its research, including by increasing its network of local primary sources to deliver exclusive data and distinctive analysis. Through BIC's extensive coding process, researchers conduct regular interviews with local actors and reporters operating in hard-to-reach and war-torn communities across the Middle East and North Africa in order to obtain first-hand data, verify facts, and deliver insights for policy briefs. This year, BIC published over 30 papers, including a flagship series on the conflict in Yemen, detailed below.

BIC promoted this research and analysis by organizing 6 high-level conferences, which facilitated constructive dialogue between policy-makers, civil society, international organizations, and academics. These events sought to provide timely responses and recommendations to address urgent crises, such as Turkey's invasion of Northern Syria, and the growing risk of conflict between Iran and its neighbors and the United States.

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BIC WELCOMES AMBASSADOR MARC OTTE AS NEW PRESIDENT



“Ambassador Marc Otte has served the past four years as Director General of the Egmont Institute for International Relations”

In 2019, BIC welcomed Ambassador Marc Otte, as its new President. Ambassador Otte is a Belgian diplomat who has held numerous posts within the Belgian MFA, including Ambassador to Israel. Between 1999 and 2003, he served as Advisor for Security and Defense Policy to the High Representative for EU Foreign and Security Policy, and from 2003 to 2011, as EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.

For the past four years, he served as Director General of the Egmont Royal Institute of International Relations. He formerly served as Belgian Special Envoy for Syria and vice-President of the European Institute for Peace. He has written several articles and contributed to books on European defense and security as well as on the Middle East

Ambassador Otte brings a wealth of expertise, insight and wisdom to BIC’s strategic analysis and research. He has already directed and chaired multiple BIC events, and notably welcomed the new European Union’s new leadership with an [open letter](#) offering words of advice and encouragement to inspire an audacious agenda for a stronger and smarter Global Europe.



EVENTS AND ADVOCACY



[The Return of Great Power Politics: Countering Hybrid Threats to Europe - BIC Conference](#) – 20 March 2019

Hosted **Ms. Rebecca Harms MEP** and **Mr. Tunne Kelam MEP** at the European Parliament

Despite the disproportionate focus on proxy wars and counter-terrorism in security discourse over the past two decades, inter-state rivalry and great-power politics have redrawn the priorities of foreign and defense policies. In light of new challenges, BIC organized a panel discussion on the impacts of hybrid threats and geopolitical challenges to Europe, bringing together organizations including the **Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS)**, **Egmont Institute**, **Institute for European Studies**, and the **Hennadiy Udovenko Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine**.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Ambassador Marc Otte**, BIC President
- **Mr. Antonios Nestoras**, Researcher, Institute for European Studies
- **Mr. Andrii Nadzhos**, Counsellor from the Mission of Ukraine to the European Union
- **Ms. Olena Snigyr**, Chief Analyst, Hennadiy Udovenko Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine
- Moderated by: **Mr. James Moran**, Associate Senior Research Fellow at the Center for European Policy Studies.



[How the EU and NATO Should Tackle Trans-Atlantic Challenges - Interactive Dialogue](#) – 4 April 2019

On April 4, NATO marked the 70th anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. To commemorate this milestone, BICr, in partnership with **Beyond the Horizon**, held a panel discussion on NATO's evolving role in international security, and its capabilities to respond to 21st century challenges. The event brought together experts from think tanks, universities and international organizations, including keynote speakers from the **Centre for European Policy Studies**, **the European Parliament** and **Harvard University**. The discussion considered not only how to strengthen the NATO's competitive advantages, but also explored avenues for a broader strategies to enhance its global operations and capacity.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Dr. Nickals Novaki**, Member of the European Parliament, EPP
- **Dr. Steven Blockmans**, Senior Research Fellow and Head of EU Foreign Policy Unit at CEPS
- **Dr. Seth Johnston**, Professor, Harvard University
- Moderated by **Ms. Kate Jackson**, Project Manager, BIC





Pursuit of Diplomacy in the Middle East - Public Lecture at the London School of Economics – 15 November 2019

The Bussels International Center, in partnership with the **London School of Economics** UNSOC, hosted a public lecture and panel discussion, featuring a keynote address by **BIC President, Ambassador Marc Otte**, who offered an analysis on recent developments in the Middle East and potential avenues for renewed diplomacy in the region. As the situation in Syria continues to unfold, protests brew in Lebanon, Iraq and Algeria, and renewed discussions of Russian influence in the region continue, the Middle East increasingly serves as the perfect landscape to understanding the true meaning and value of modern diplomacy.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Ambassador Marc Otte**, BIC President
- **Dr. Ali Bhagat**, Professor, University of Manchester
- **Dr. Sandra Pogodda**, Professor, University of Manchester
- **Dr. Richard Caplan**, Professor, University of Oxford
- **Mr. Sayed Razawi**, Director General United Nations House Scotland





Mounting challenges in EU-Turkey Relations: Defining Ways Forward – 20 November 2019

Hosted by **MEP Ms. Frédérique Ries**, Vice-Chair of the Renew Europe Group, at the European Parliament

This conference, organized by BIC, yielded a constructive conversation between EU policy-makers, academics, civil society, and human rights experts, on the current state of political and humanitarian affairs in Turkey, while simultaneously demonstrating the impact that these developments have on the EU. This event considered the risks and opportunities ahead in EU-Turkey relations, and reflected on how the EU could develop strategic policies to maximise its added-value as a regional actor. The conference was moderated by **Ambassador Marc Otte**, BIC President and Belgian Special Envoy to Syria.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Mr. Kim Freidberg**, Director, RELEX Directorate Enlargement, Security, Civil Protection, Foreign Affairs - Council of the European Union
- **Mr. Calin-Ionut Ungur**, Deputy Head of Division EU-Turkey Relations – EEAS
- **Ms. Amanda Paul**, Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre
- **Mr. Can Dündar**, Turkish Journalist, Columnist and Documentarian *Recipient of the International Press Freedom Award*



Avoiding Multi-State Conflict in the Middle East: How the EU can Foster Regional Peace - 11 December 2019

Hosted by **MEP Mr. Lukas Mandl**, Vice-Chair of the EP Subcommittee on Security and Defence, at the European Parliament

Organized by the Brussels International Center, this event sought to answer how the EU could better leverage its diplomatic influence to strategically de-escalate tensions across the Middle East. The event brought together experts, academics and EU policy-makers to debate perspectives on how best to preempt potential conflict, and also consider what concrete steps a new 'geopolitical' European Commission should take to demonstrate strategic leadership in the region.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Ambassador Marc Otte**, BIC President
- **Dr. Peter Krois**, Austrian Delegate for North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf Region
- **Dr. Amelie Chelly**, Expert on Iran and Middle East, CADIS (EHES-CNRS) Paris
- **Ms. Paula Yacoubian**, Lebanese MP, Journalist and Recipient of the Officer of the Order of the Crown Award
- Moderated by **Ms. Shada Islam**, Director of Europe and Geopolitics at Friends of Europe





Turkey's Deepening Deterioration of Human Rights: From Emergency to a Perpetual Crackdown - 27 January 2020

*Keynote Speech by **MEP Ms. Özlem Demirel**, Vice-chair of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence, and Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee at the European Parliament.*

One day prior to the UN Universal Periodic Review on Turkey, this timely event brought together human rights experts, journalists, academics and policy-makers to assess the current human rights situation in the Turkey and propose strategic and evidence-based recommendations to different stakeholders, both at the EU and UN level. The event yielded set of policy recommendations that were President of the UN Human Rights Council, **Ms. Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger**, and the Chair of European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights, **MEP Ms. Maria Arena** (seen below).

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Mr. Doğan Özgüden**, Turkish Journalist and Publisher, Editor in chief at Info Turk & Recipient of the Ayse Zarakolu Freedom of Thought Prize
- **Ms. Sibylle Gioé**, International Human Rights Lawyer, International Trial Observer for Turkish Lawyers
- **Mr. Ihsan Cibelik**, Turkish Musician, Grup Yorum



FEATURED RESEARCH: NORTH AFRICA



[The CFA Franc: A Stabilizing Force or Neocolonial Relic in West Africa?](#)

11 February 2019

The CFA Franc has undoubtedly provided general macroeconomic stability across West Africa for several decades, however its efficacy is challenged by the region's poor economic integration, and weak integration into global value chains. This report finds that while criticism of the CFA franc as a mere neocolonial tool may oversimplify more complex dynamics, it is clear that the CFA supported a counterproductive logic focused on facilitating trade with France and developed countries, rather than tightening economic ties between African states, which distorted natural patterns of growth and regional integration.



[Tunisia: How Economic Mismanagement Continues to Undermine the Democratic Process](#)

21 March 2019

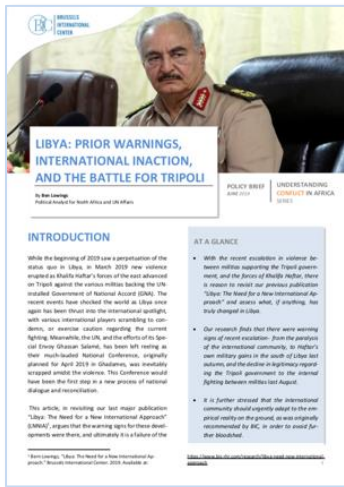
As an initiator of the Arab spring in December 2010, Tunisia is regarded as the only successful transition process in the MENA region. The country is holding its legislative and presidential elections this year, respectively on the 6th of October and 10th of November 2019. However, election euphoria risks hiding a less optimistic picture. This article examines the intertwined factors impeding economic restructuring in Tunisia, suggesting that without ambitious reforms, the elections may further exacerbate an already critical situation.



[Sudan: Economy and Military in the Fall of Bashir](#)

11 April 2019

After thirty years in power, President Omar al-Bashir has been forced from office in Sudan. The announcement by the Sudanese military came following weeks of public demonstrations, which have led to sometimes violent repression. This article examines the economic drivers behind the recent protests, the crucial role of the military in forcing change, and emphasizes caution in the long-term future of Sudan due to legitimate fears that this military coup may lead to continued authoritarian rule.



Libya: Prior Warnings, International Inaction, and the Battle for Tripoli

3 June 2019

With the recent escalation in violence between militias supporting the Tripoli government, and the forces of Khalifa Haftar, there is cause to revisit our previous publication “Libya: The Need for a New International Approach” and assess what, if anything, has truly changed in Libya. This report argues that there were warning signs of this escalation, from the paralysis of the international community, to Haftar’s own military gains in the south of Libya last autumn, and the decline in legitimacy regarding the Tripoli government to the internal fighting between militias last August. It is further stressed that the international community should urgently adapt to the empirical reality on the ground in order to avoid further bloodshed.



Regionalism in North Africa: the Arab Maghreb Union in 2019

7 June 2019

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), this contribution discusses the state of play since its creation. This report analyses the AMU from three perspectives: political, economic and cultural. Throughout the research process, this report collected a number of primary data, namely from the Arab Maghreb Union, the African Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Security Council. It concludes that, in spite of current political challenges in the region, the AMU countries would highly benefit from increased regional integration, namely in terms of economic development and regional cohesion.



The Tunisian Democratic Transition: A Critically Threatened Process

12 June 2019

This paper outlines the entangled impediments to the Tunisian democratization process, arguing there can be no true democracy without a durable solution to the economic crisis, political stability, a thorough implementation of local governance, an efficient and transparent Constitutional Court, and a justice system reform that would entrench accountability, particularly for human rights violations. This paper’s argument essentially relies on primary data gathered through interviews with Tunisian experts and civil society activists working on the aforementioned issues. The aim of this paper is to assess the current reality of the Tunisian democratization process, and delineate the deficiencies that could deviate its evolution towards a return to an authoritarian regime.



[Sudan: Relating Identity Politics and Cyclical Violence](#)

14 August 2019

This paper suggests that there is one particular factor that has exacerbated tensions and divisions within Sudan, and has consequently allowed violence to continue to be expressed during political events in Sudan, and that is the issue of identity politics. Rather than exploring the difficulties and misconceptions with this particular conceptual apparatus, this paper focuses on particular aspects relevant to this context; state-run ethnically-driven militias and Special Forces, historical marginalization of specific linguistic and religious groups along ethnic lines, and the prospects for prolonged peace in Sudan, given the deep divisions fostered between the Sudanese people.



[Mauritania: The Military's Permanence in 'Democracy'](#)

13 September 2019

This report analyzes the false stability that characterizes the Mauritanian regime, based on the hegemonic rule of the military, aborted attempts to transfer power to civilians, and wide inequalities between social and ethnic groups. Research was collected information in Arabic, English and French, and conducted through interviews with Mauritanian and non-Mauritanian experts, journalists, and professors as to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the country's political and social construction.



[Sudan: Mapping Transitional Justice Strategies for Effective Democratic Transition](#)

12 November 2019

As Sudan continues its path toward transition, the question of transitional justice processes is at hand. While there are different conceptions of transitional justice, and different notions of implementation, what is best for Sudan must be sensitive to context and be supported by the help of the international community. Given the start of peace talks, and the related underlying issues affecting the new Sudanese government, this article explores what would a successful process of transitional justice might look like, ensuring that the political transition to democracy continues to strengthen.



[Turkey and Libya: The Urgency for Europe to Act to Prevent Further Tragedy](#) 20 January 2020

As Libya's war enters 2020, dynamics within the war-ravaged country took a dramatic turn when the Turkish parliament, a regional ally of the GNA in Tripoli, approved the deployment of Turkish ground-forces in support of the GNA's position on 3 January. Since then Turkey has sent military advisors, and Syrian rebel forces allied with Turkey, in support of Fayeze al-Serraj's administration. This article argues that with the possibility of direct Turkish involvement, there is a likelihood of a new catastrophic confrontation. For European policymakers, having been strategically absent for the past five years, the window for action may be fast closing.

NORTH AFRICA RESEARCH TEAM



BEN LOWINGS

Political Analyst for North Africa and UN Affairs



YASMINE AKRIMI

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FEATURED RESEARCH: MIDDLE EAST



[Yemen Policy Report # 1 - Dissensus at the Security Council](#) 15 July 2019

BIC's flagship Yemen series represents the culmination of months of research and development by our team. This first installment examines UN Security Council Resolution language, explaining how the international community has become reluctant to name and blame specific actors in the Yemen conflict. The data shows that there have been three periods of UNSC consensus on the Yemen crisis, each successively becoming more generalized due to the increased politicization of the conflict. These trends indicate that the UNSC strategy towards Yemen, regarding the language of its UNSCRs, is now lacking key principles that would otherwise allow for a clearer portrayal of the roles and responsibilities of all relevant parties.



Yemen Policy Report # 2 - Coup-proofing in Yemen: Saleh's Military

24 July 2019

This paper discusses the transition in Yemen and explains how Saleh's policies stood as an obstruction in the path of Hadi's government. The transition's failure was influenced by various factors. The paper addresses this failure from the angle of Saleh's coup-proofing practices during his years in power. The paper briefly explored the notion of coup-proofing and explained how it assists in understanding the fragmentation in the country's security apparatus.



Yemen Policy Report # 3 - The Civil War in Yemen: Understanding the Actors

26 July 2019

This piece attempts to provide a thorough demonstration of the main local actors operating in Yemen. Despite the weight that the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis hold, other prominent actors that resemble an instrumental fraction of the society exist in Yemen. As such, attempting to rationalize contemporary Yemen with excluding other prominent actors would be insufficient. Although these actors vary in power and in tendency, their roles in the conflict can have far reaching influence.



Yemen Policy Report # 4 - A Weapon of War in Yemen: An Analysis of the Ongoing Food Crisis in 2019

30 July 2019

This paper explores the complexities of the humanitarian aid crisis, specifically regarding the potential famine situation taking place throughout Yemen. Specifically, this paper will look at one of the organizations that has been most involved in the food crisis, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), which has faced many struggles in trying to distribute food and build reliable partnerships throughout Yemen. These struggles are not unique to the WFP, which resonates how some of the recurring themes of the food crisis are not being addressed by the international community, and are ultimately worsening the crisis situation in Yemen.



Yemen Policy Report # 5 - Yemeni Women in Peace Processes: From 2015 to Today

2 August 2019

The role of women in Yemen has transformed throughout the conflict period. For a country that consistently suffers to uphold and promote the rights of women, there are those individuals and groups who prevail. This chapter will explore the changing roles of women in Yemen, and how the perceptions of women in peacebuilding contexts have transformed between the time of the postArab Spring peace negotiations in the National Dialogue council, into the role that women take in today's conflict.



Lebanon under fire – Protesters are taking the streets with a burning desire to overthrow the government

28 Oct 2019

This article aims to unpack key issues necessary to understand recent developments in Lebanon. The first part of the paper is dedicated to analysing the Lebanese political landscape, focusing on explanations for the state's inefficiency in meeting the expectations of the population and its subsequent frustration. The second part engages in a thorough report on the current developments of the protest and investigates the motivation of the Lebanese people. The third part considers the possible outcomes that might derive from such intense demonstrations.



Power of the People: Sectarian Rhetoric and Iran's Role in Fueling Division in Iraq

16 December 2019

The first section of this paper begins with a historical background of modern sectarianism in Iraq. Due to the constraints in this scope of research, the history begins after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. The following section will outline a background to which the rhetoric surrounding Iran's sectarian vision in Iraqi affairs has been established in a post-2003 invasion setting, ultimately leading to the current situation today where protests around Iraq are threatening the relationship which Iran has fostered since 2003.



Protests in Iran: A Desperate Call for Reform

January 2020

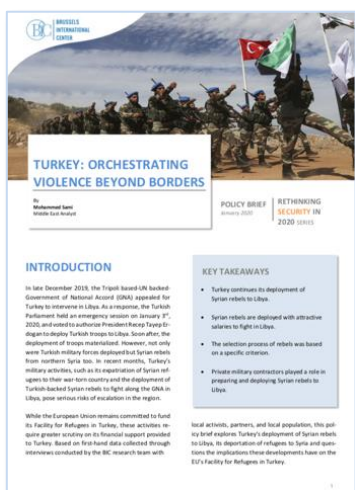
Despite the regime's concerted efforts to forcefully contain the protests, often through repression or intimidation, the recurrence of unrests reveals an underlying failure to address the root causes of numerous issues. Based on data collected on the recent anti-regime protests that took place between December 2017 and January 2020, this policy brief suggests that more progress could be made if the EU deployed increased diplomatic resources to pressure the Iranian regime to implement domestic reforms. For this purpose, the EU should consider using the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as a means to incentivize positive change in Iran.



Combatting a Geopolitical Void: The EU's Role in the Future of Iraq

5 February 2020

This report explores how rising tensions in the region could cultivate an environment for the Islamic State to regain power, for new global actors to emerge within Iraq to combat IS. It concludes that the lack of coherence between EU diplomatic actions and the military actions of individual states has resulted in an ambiguous action plan for the EU's role in Iraq, opening space for other actors such as Russia and China to intervene. Following the airstrike that killed Iranian General Soleimani, Russia again offered to sell the Iraqi government their S-400 air defense system, and China has positioned itself to provide the necessary financial support to increase cooperation



Turkey: Orchestrating Violence Beyond Borders

12 February 2020

In recent months, Turkey's military activities, such as its expatriation of Syrian refugees to their war-torn country and the deployment of Turkish-backed Syrian rebels to fight along the GNA in Libya, pose serious risks of escalation in the region. Based on first-hand data collected through interviews conducted by the BIC research team with local activists, partners, and local population, this report explores Turkey's deployment of Syrian rebels to Libya, its deportation of refugees to Syria and questions the implications these developments have on the EU's Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

MIDDLE EAST RESEARCH TEAM



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Primary Data & Coding Assistant



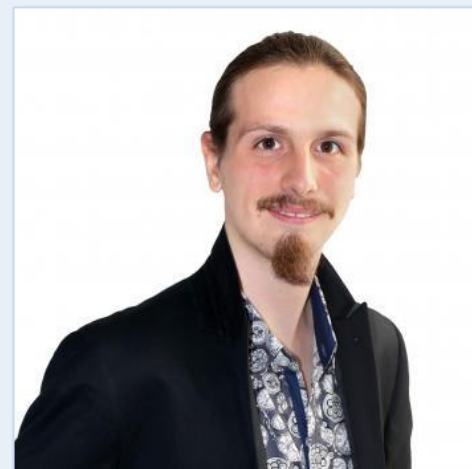
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Partners with whom BIC has signed an official agreement or memorandum of understanding.



Beyond the Horizon - International Strategic Studies Group (ISSG)



Out of the box / Atelier Pédagogique à Bruxelles



European Grants International Academy SRL



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Non-exhaustive list of partners with whom BIC has collaborated with for events and papers.



International Center of Excellence in
Countering Violent Extremism, Hedayah



Egmont Institute



OSCE



European Peacebuilding Liaison Office



Friends of Europe



London School of Economics



European Parliament



Vrije Universiteit Brussel



Transparency International Defense
and Security



Erasmus +



All Digital AISBL



Science Po Paris

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2020: FUTURE PROJECTS

RETHINKING SECURITY IN 2020

BIC's latest project takes critical aim at yesterday's approaches to security and defence, with a view towards developing proactive solutions to the evolving nature of insecurity and hybrid warfare. In line with its research methodology, BIC will source first-hand research through its extensive coding process, and use both qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the impacts of new trends - such as disinformation campaigns, cyber warfare, climate challenges, and geopolitical factors - on the various social, political and economic drivers of conflict and instability. In order to bring added value, and build on the substantial body of discourse on the topic, **BIC researchers will apply this analytical lens across three specific themes:**

- 1) The first theme will assess how the **EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy** should adapt to foster the flexibility, cooperation, and coherence needed to address 21st century challenges. This theme will weigh the impact of broad ambitions for 'European Strategic Autonomy,' and consider how the EU should strengthen cooperation with NATO and other emerging powers, while simultaneously guaranteeing self-determination.
- 2) The second theme will concentrate on new trends in **Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention**, analysing the increasing impact of disinformation campaigns, geopolitical proxy influences, and economic warfare on mediating post-conflict situations and pursuing transitional justice.
- 3) The third theme will focus on identifying and exploring **Transnational Challenges to Water and Energy**, as well as the growing intersectionality between climate and conflict, and developing locally tailored solutions to reduce risks.

