

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER

2020 – 2021

RESEARCH & ACTIVITIES PORTFOLIO

AT A GLANCE:

In 2020, BIC successfully launched its new flagship project, “**Rethinking Security in the 2020s**,” which takes critical aim at yesterday’s approaches to security and defense, with a view towards developing proactive solutions to the evolving nature of insecurity, hybrid warfare, and COVID-19. Over the past year, BIC has published over **25 research papers, analyses and reports**, examining the intersections between gender, economic development, health security and conflict.

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, BIC continued promoted its research and analysis by organizing **6 high-level virtual conferences**, which facilitated constructive dialogue between policy-makers, civil society, international organizations, and academics. These events provided timely responses and recommendations **to address key crises**, focusing mainly on Libya, the Sahel region, Yemen, and the wider MENA region.

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BIC WELCOMES TOP EXPERTS SIHAM AL JIBOURY AND SHADA ISLAM



SIHAM AL JIBOURY, SENIOR MIDDLE EAST ADVISER

Ms. Siham Al Jiboury joins BIC as Senior Advisor to the Middle East Research Department, bringing a wealth of geographic and thematic expertise, with particular focus on security, radicalization, human and women rights, religious and ethnic minorities.

As former UN official, she gained over twenty-five years of experience in the fields of peace-keeping and development while serving with the United Nations Mission in Morocco, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in Jordan, and the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (UNSTAMIH).

SHADA ISLAM, SENIOR COMMENTATOR ON GEOPOLITICS

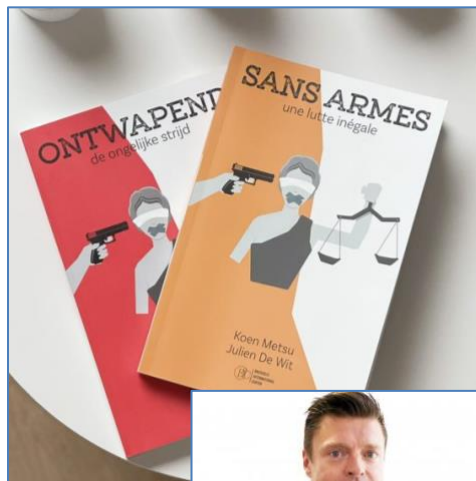
Shada Islam is an influential Brussels-based specialist on European Union affairs who works independently as a commentator, advisor, analyst and strategist on Europe, Asia, Africa, Geopolitics, Trade, Migration, Inclusion, Diversity and Women's Empowerment. She runs her own Brussels-based global strategy and advisory media company, New Horizons Project (NHP).

At the BIC, Shada collaborates as a Senior Commentator on Geopolitics, contributing to written commentaries on EU-MENA relations. Since joining, Shada Islam has co-authored an article focusing on gender and conflict: [Why the EU should put women front and centre of its new agenda for the Southern Mediterranean.](#)



BIC'S NEW AVERA DEPARTMENT: UNDERSTANDING AND FIGHTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

One of BIC's key accomplishments in 2020 is the development and expansion of its AVERA research department, which aims to deepen understanding of the drivers of violent extremism, and develop innovative response mechanisms to address these drivers. The AVERA department provides analysis of collected primary data from various sources to produce monthly and studies in multiple languages.

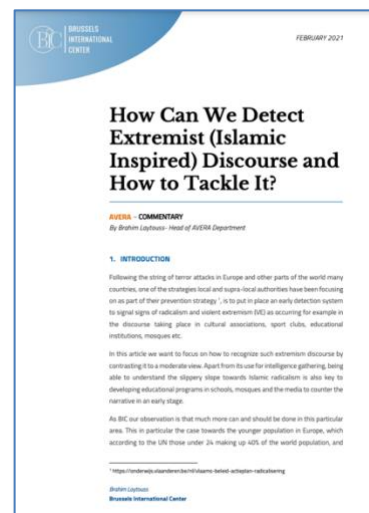
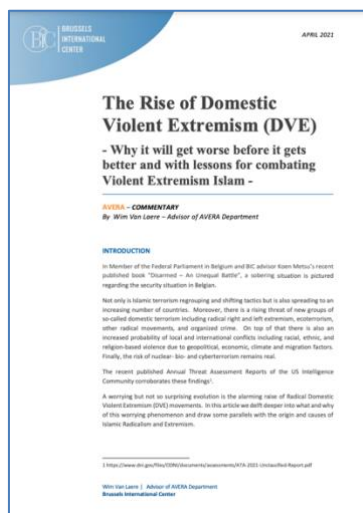


DISARMED: NEW BOOK EXAMINES SECURITY POLICIES 5 YEARS AFTER BRUSSELS TERRORIST ATTACKS

Mr. Koen Metsu, BIC's Senior Adviser to the AVERA research department and Member of the Belgian Federal Parliament published a book, "**Disarmed**" which examines future threats of radicalization, the advance of the radical left and right, nuclear terrorism, bio-terrorism and cyber-terrorism, as well as organized crime.. Through countless interviews with security services, victims, experts and insiders, Metsu completes a full review of the security apparatus, including State Security, Justice, Europol and Defense. Based on these analyses, the book offers solutions and develops a long-term vision for a smarter and safer approach to radicalization in the future.

Since 2014, Koen Metsu has been a member of the Federal Parliament on the Internal Affairs Committee where he closely monitoring the topics of security, radicalization, and terrorism. From 2015 to 2018, he chaired the new temporary committee "Counter Terrorism" and met numerous researchers and experts. He is also part of the delegation leader and speaker of the "Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group" (JPSG), which conducts a unique form of rigorous research into the functioning of Europol.

RECENT RESEARCH FROM THE AVERA DEPARTMENT



EVENTS AND ADVOCACY



The Latest Developments in Libya, Finding a Way Forward – May 2020 – Online Conference

Organized by BIC, this event sought to facilitate a constructive debate and provide a forum to discuss the recent developments in Libya, the UN and EU's approach to the crisis, the intervening factor of a potentially devastating outbreak of COVID-19, and whether these factors will strengthen or weaken prospects for lasting peace. Participants discussed what steps the international community could, or should, do for the Libyan crisis with an aim towards constructive policy recommendations.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Mr. Kasper Engborg**, Acting Head of Office for UN OCHA in Libya
- **Mr. Tim Eaton**, Senior Research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House
- **Ms. Rosamaria Gili**, Acting Director and Head of Division, Maghreb, European External Action Service (EEAS)
- **Mr. Javier Nart**, Member of the European Parliament
- **Mr. Lorenzo Marinone**, Senior Analyst for the Middle East and North Africa Desk at Ce.S.I. – Centro Studi Internazionali
- **Ms. Rhiannon Smith**, Managing Director of Libya-Analysis

MODERATED BY: Ben Lowings, BIC Political Analyst



20 years into the Women, Peace and Security Agenda – June 2020 – Online Conference

Co-organized with Friends of Europe, this event examined the intersection between COVID-19 and the Women Peace and Security agenda (WPS), and sought to determine what more the UN, EU, NATO and other organisations could do to implement the WPS. It further examined how the WPS agenda could address gendered aspects of security challenges arising from the COVID-19 crisis, and how it can unleash its potential to impact global peace and security.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Clare Hutchinson**, NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security
- **Muthaka Ilot Alphonse**, International Programme Manager for Ghana and Liberia at the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU)
- **Charlotte Isaksson**, Senior Gender Expert at the European External Action Service (EEAS)
- **Paivi Kannisto**, Chief of Peace and Security Section at UN Women
- **Rosa Emilia Salamanca**, Director at the Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE), Colombia





Rethinking governance and security in the Sahel: towards an action-oriented approach –

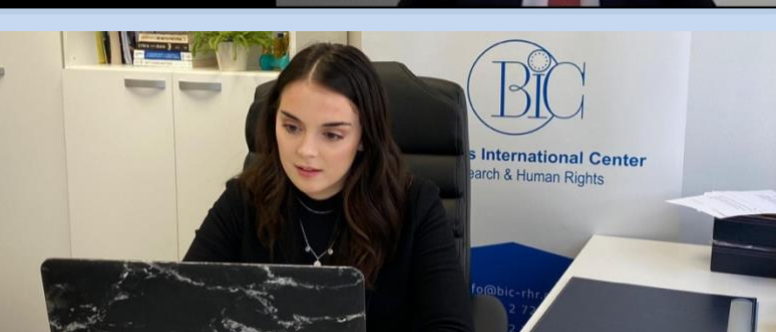
July 2020 – Online Conference

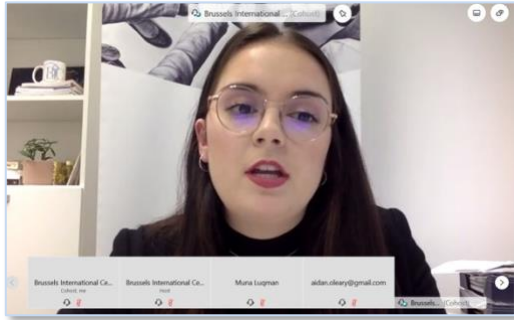
Organized by BIC, this event brought together a group of security experts, EU officials, academics and civil society to develop pragmatic strategies for a reformed approach to governance in the Sahel, both during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Focusing especially on the emergency situations in Mali and Niger, it will explore solutions to persistent challenges based on bottom-up approaches to governance that leverage the resilience capacities of local communities in the region.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Ambassador Angel Losada**, EU Special Representative for the Sahel
- **Mr. Karounga Keita**, Director Sahel Office, Wetlands International
- **Ms. Delina Goxho**, Security Analyst on Protection of Civilians and Remote Warfare in the Sahel, Open Society Foundations
- **Mr. Mauro Lorenzini**, Head of Central and Western Africa Bureau, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- **Ms. Alviina Alametsä**, Member of the European Parliament, Shadow-Rapporteur on the EU-African Security Cooperation in the Sahel region

MODERATED BY: **Brandon Locke**, BIC Senior Strategic Adviser and **Marco Di Liddo**, Cesi Senior Analyst





Yemen's humanitarian aid response plan: biometric technology and civilian security –

October 2020 – Online Conference

This conference, organized by BIC, explored the state of advanced aid delivery systems and biometric aid systems, and considered what can be realistically done to improve the humanitarian disaster in Yemen. The discussion established a multifaceted approach to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, by attempting to identify a path forward in restructuring the aid system throughout the country, while maintaining focus on the integrity and security of civilians.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

- **Ms. Muna Luqman**, Founder of Food for Humanity and Chairperson for the Women's Solidarity Network
- **Mr. Aidan O'Leary**, Head of Office for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Yemen
- **Mr. Borja Miguelez**, Humanitarian Aid Desk Officer for Yemen at the European Commission, DG ECHO
- **Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze**, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Representative in Yemen

MODERATED BY: Elisa Cherry, BIC Middle-East Analyst



The US Presidential crossroads: foreign policy implications for the MENA Region –

December 2020 – Online Conference

Organized by the BIC, 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 Dr. Michele Dunne**, Director and Senior Fellow Middle East at Carnegie Endowment for Peace (US)
- **Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer**, former U.S. ambassador to Egypt; Visiting Professor in Middle East Policy Studies at Princeton University
- **Mr. Jamie Fly**, Senior Fellow and Senior Advisor to the President, German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)
- **Ms. Maja Urbanska**, European External Action Service (EEAS) Acting Head of Division, US
- **Professor Cherkaoui Roudani**, University Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco

MODERATED BY: Ambassador Marc Otte, BIC President





“The impact of COVID-19 did not so much reveal new issues as it underlined the threat of existing trends”

Ambassador Marc Otte
President of the Brussels International Center

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.

FEATURED RESEARCH: NORTH AFRICA



[Sudan And Covid-19: A Vulnerable Economy in Crisis](#) April 2020

This report finds that Sudan's government has, so far, been relatively successful at responding and communicating the risks of COVID-19 to citizens. There are, however, signs of discontent from some pockets of society. Potential issues may be exacerbated by a growing risk to the economy, and the impact of food and medicinal shortages on consumer prices and availability. The report finds that international aid has been primarily focused on the humanitarian sector, unlike other neighboring countries, which may be unhelpful for economic stabilization.



[The Gerd Challenge: How A Compromise Can Be Reached Through Cooperation](#) July 2020

The GERD is an Ethiopian gravity-based hydroelectric power dam located on the Blue Nile river, near the border with Sudan. The dam project started in April 2011 and is due to open this month of July 2020. This report examined the political rhetoric surrounding the GERD issue, including arbitration, and found most to be a damaging and a counterproductive distraction. While the project could pose a risk to Egypt and Sudan without proper safeguards, protection of all interests could be found through technical solutions, such as coordinated water release schedules and adopting dynamic release to prevent droughts.

[Covid-19 And Intra-African Migration Fluxes: Food Insecurity and Its Consequences](#)

June 2020



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.

[Algeria’s Hydrocarbons Crisis: Prospects of A New Beginning](#)

July 2020



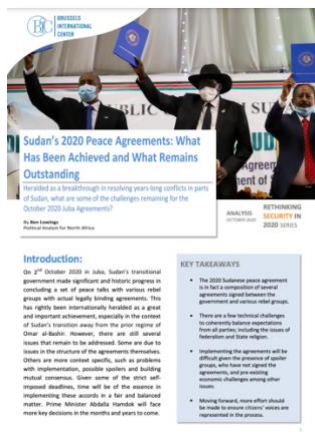
Algeria has been heavily relying on its nationalized hydrocarbon industry to maintain both its sovereignty and social peace since its independence, to the extent that oil and gas are part of the country’s identity. According to the World Bank, gas and oil presently represent 96% of exports and 60% of the national budget’s income. However, the country’s reliance on hydrocarbons is falling off short as its economic growth has been reduced by 50% in less than five years. In 2014, Algeria held almost \$200 billion dollars of exchange reserve assets as opposed to \$60 billion dollars today. In contrast, the Algerian economy has never been this dependent on hydrocarbons and services linked to it.

[A Third Government In Less Than A Year: Analysis Of Tunisia’s Political System’s Crisis](#)

September 2020



This report is an assessment of Tunisia’s constant political and institutional blockage, governmental instability and parliamentary inconsistencies, and considers options that can pave the way for a necessary political and constitutional reform. Governmental instability has characterized post-revolution Tunisian politics. Since 2011, the country has witnessed nine governments. The report finds that Tunisia needs a more simplified and coherent constitution that allows for the unity of the executive branch and a clear majority within the parliament.



[Sudan's 2020 Peace Agreements: What Has Been Achieved And What Remains Outstanding](#)

October 2020

On 2nd October 2020 in Juba, Sudan's transitional government made significant and historic progress in concluding a set of peace talks with various rebel groups with legally binding agreements. This has been internationally heralded as a great and important achievement, especially in the context of Sudan's transition away from the prior regime. This report argues that there are still several issues that remain to be addressed. Some are due to issues in the structure of the agreements themselves. Others are more context specific, such as problems with implementation, possible spoilers and building mutual consensus. Given strict self-imposed deadlines, time will be of the essence in implementing these accords in a fair and balanced matter.



[Extractivism, Neoliberal Governance and Environmental Racism in the Maghreb](#)

February 2021

This report examines the concept of environmental racism, which has been popularized in recent years with the new visibility and high politicization of the climate change problematic. Coined in the United States in the eighties, it essentially refers to an internal colonial model that exploits the labor and land of minorities to the benefit of a dominant class. In the Maghreb, this model mainly performs through extractivism. The report finds that these extractivist industries are principally located in towns inhabited by black communities, which suffer the economic, environmental and health consequences of pollution and waste. These communities lack basic infrastructure and register high unemployment rates compared to national averages.

FEATURED RESEARCH: MIDDLE EAST



[Ongoing Missile Attacks in Iraq: Targeting Foreign Troops and Exposing EU Absenteeism](#)

March 2020

Iraqi military bases hosting foreign troops have been repeatedly targeted over the last several months, with little-to-no response from the European Union. This report finds that consolidation of foreign troops onto fewer military bases could have future implications on the susceptibility of these military bases to missile and rocket attacks. The role of the European Union remains unseen, and its failure to respond to most of these attacks exemplifies a disconnect in the military operations of Member States and the political decisions at the EU level. BIC recommends that the safety of military personnel be continually re-evaluated as the dynamics between the US and Iran impact the security of foreign military personnel in Iraq.

[Plight Of The Protests: Iraq And Lebanon's Trials And Tribulations In The Face Of Covid-19](#)

June 2020



October 2019 marked the beginning of civil protests in Iraq and Lebanon, calling for political reform, an overhaul of political elites and improvements to state services for civilians. This report found that the new Kadhimi government faces many challenges in the upcoming months such as tackling the ongoing protests, corruption, economic turmoil, and a failing health system, which are only worsened by the stresses of the pandemic. It found that the failing health system in Iraq and the inability of the government to enforce lockdown measures has forced civilians to self-regulate by educating one another on how to slow the spread of coronavirus.

[Prioritizing the Locals: A Response To The Ongoing Humanitarian Aid Crisis In Yemen](#)

October 2020



This research is based off BIC's roundtable with international, local and field-based experts to discuss the humanitarian situation in Yemen. The underlying notion of the conversation was concerning the significance of local involvement in the work of humanitarian aid organizations. Specifically, that international partners who are working throughout Yemen must prioritize the involvement of local actors in order to provide the most vulnerable populations with the necessary aid, in an efficient and effective manner. It found that collaboration with local partners provides multiple advantages, such as the vital local knowledge, and a network to access remote areas of the country.

[The Al-Hash'd al-Shaabi, Paramilitary Groups In Iraq](#)

December 2020



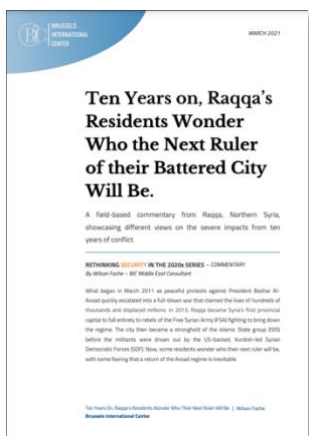
This The al-Hash'd al-Shaabi have consolidated their political power in recent years, expanding their influence beyond local paramilitary operations. Desires for political advancement while simultaneously remaining autonomous with paramilitary actions has fueled the rise of Iraqi elites to maintain control as politicians and heads of paramilitary groups. The Iraqi government has institutionalized the al-Hash'd al-Shaabi forces since the fall of the Islamic State in 2017, resulting in an official, highly autonomous security actor with political power and access to state funds. Paramilitary forces in Iraq play a significant role in the security of the country, particularly in areas beyond the capital, where Islamic State fighters are still operating.



[Causes of the Crisis: Yemen's Humanitarian Struggle, Economic Disaster and Corruption Catastrophe](#)

February 2021

The weaponization of humanitarian aid has been well publicized over past years, with emphasis on the severity of Yemen's crisis as the worst humanitarian situation in the world. The statistics are staggering, yet the numbers seem to be almost numbing, to the point where they have become obsolete rather than exemplary of the dire situation. This paper examines the plight of Yemenis continuing to suffer in direct effect from the conflict, and finds that rather than blaming the Houthis rebels, the Yemeni government, or the international institutions for the failing to provide for the population, there needs to be further analysis into the impact of the conflict on the humanitarian situation. The bleak situation in Yemen divulges the unfortunate truth that the humanitarian crisis will not end with the conflict, unless the political and economic troubles are also tackled.



[Ten Years on, Raqqa's Residents Wonder Who the Next Ruler of their Battered City Will Be.](#)

March 2021

A field-based commentary from Raqqa, Northern Syria, showcasing different views on the severe impacts from ten years of conflict. What began in March 2011 as peaceful protests against President Bashar Al-Assad quickly escalated into a full-blown war that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and displaced millions. In 2013, Raqqa became Syria's first provincial capital to fall entirely to rebels of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighting to bring down the regime. The city then became a stronghold of the Islamic State group (ISIS) before the militants were driven out by the US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Now, some residents wonder who their next ruler will be, with some fearing that a return of the Assad regime is inevitable.



[Palestinian Elections: A Key to a Return to Negotiations of a Peace with Israel?](#)

March 2021

BIC's President Ambassador Otte penned a special commentary on the Palestinian Elections, offering reflections on potential scenarios, and whether potential restoration in the legitimacy of the Palestinian leadership could be a key step towards resumption of peace negotiations with Israel. He writes that whatever the results of Palestinian (and Israeli) elections, a return to Israeli Palestinian direct negotiations for a peace deal will require leadership and creativity from both sides and from international sponsors.



PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

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



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