BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER

2018 – 2019

RESEARCH & ACTIVITIES PORTFOLIO

Between 2017 and 2019, **BIC carried out six comprehensive projects**, detailed below, which each included a set of full-length policy briefings, events, and activities. Within these projects, **BIC has organized 14 high-level roundtable discussions and conferences, mainly at the European Parliament**, to facilitate constructive dialogue between policy-makers, civil society, international organizations, and academics. These events intend to **strengthen decision makers' capacity to understand and respond to current and forthcoming challenges**, while also serving to inform our future research.

Table of Contents:

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Project: Conflict and Security in the Sahel

This research and advocacy project identifies the main drivers of instability, conflict and fragility in the Sahel region of Africa. This project produced a series of analyses at the regional and country level, considering the intersectionality between circular conflict, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and non-state actors. It further examined the persistent consequences of weak state authority and legitimacy, as well as the implications of the introduction of the Westphalian nation-state concept that was adopted following the colonial period. The second research component of the project specifically focused quantitative and qualitative analysis of the region's military spending and defense transparency. In addition to publications, this project realized one high-level advocacy round-table at the European Parliament, with a view towards offering constructive, pragmatic recommendations to policy-makers to address the root causes of conflict and fragility.

Project Event: [Rethinking a Sustainable Security Partnership with Africa](#)
BIC organized and moderated closed-door, interactive round-table between **20 NGOs, Ambassadors, think-tanks, and senior EU policy-makers**, to develop pragmatic strategies to address systemic instability in the Sahel region by mobilizing political will for genuine security system reform that extends beyond technical trainings. **The event considered the evolving drivers of conflict in Africa, such as climate change and horizontal inequalities**, and focused on BIC's research underlining the lack of fiscal transparency within the G5 defense sector, and potential accountability issues within the newly proposed €10.5billion European Peace Facility.

Keynote Speakers:
- **Mr. Domenico Rosa**, *European Commission, Head of Unit for EU-AU Strategic Partnerships*
- **Ms. Sonya Reines-Djivanides**, *European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, Executive Director*
- **Dr. Karolina MacLachlan**, *Transparency International Defense and Security, Regional Programme Manager*
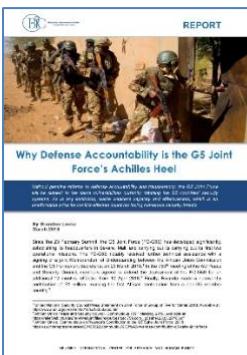
Project Publication: [Why Defense Accountability is the G5 Joint Force's Achilles Heel](#)
Without genuine reforms to defense accountability and transparency, BIC argues that the G5 Joint Force will be subject to the same vulnerabilities currently crippling the G5 countries' security systems. Since 2005, military spending has increased by 75% in Africa, and by 245% in the G5 Sahel countries over the same period. Yet despite the ballooning size of defense budgets, the Sahel G5 countries largely exempt defense ministries from audits and oversight, which has negative ramifications on both the economy and security of the G5 countries. In order to maximize the G5 Joint Force's potential, BIC urges all stakeholders should progressively work to improve defense budget transparency, and establish clear governance and oversight mechanisms for the proposed G5 Joint Force Trust Fund.

Project Publication: <u>What Is Really Going on with the G5 Joint Force?</u>

In order to understand what the G5 Joint Force might achieve, it is important to examine the motives and objectives of all actors around the table. Thus far, repeated calls for "increased security" have reflected more the interests of the ruling elite to reinforce the interests of the State, rather than increased safety for vulnerable populations. While the two are not mutually exclusive, the absence of serious commitments from Sahel leaders to address security sector reform, military accountability, and judicial reform raises serious flags. Finally, as the G5 Joint Force solicits international support from the European Union, the United States, and other countries, it will be key to reexamine how donors' political interests are reflected in the Force's operations.

Project Publication: <u>Chad, A Regional Stabilizing Force Under Pressure</u>

While Chad is widely viewed as a regional stabilizing actor, this article argues that internal economic and security vulnerabilities may jeopardize its valuable capacity, and have a larger domino effect on counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin and wider region. As the country struggles through the severe economic downturn, the government risks jeopardizing its legitimacy by adopting increasingly authoritarian policies. In the future, BIC urges the Chadian government to take serious steps to better manage domestic resources and fight corruption, including full, independent auditing of military expenditures to identify and cut out waste. The G5 Joint Force should proactively address the withdrawal of Chadian troops from the Lake Chad Basin to quickly fill any security vacuums.

Project Publication: <u>Niger Delicate Security in the Midst of Chaos</u>

Historically, Niger has enjoyed relatively strong stability, largely due to robust political cooperation, military support, rural development, and the integration of political elites from marginalized regions. However, due to pressure to from the European Union to stifle migration routes, Niger has recently faced a collection of internal and external challenges that threaten to shatter the delicate pillar of peace supporting the region. While roughly 80% of migrants in Niger are intra-African migrants that remain on the continent, the EU's push to shut down key migration hubs, such as Agadez, have had devastating effects on local populations. To foster both peace and security, the government of Niger and international partners should implement migration policies facilitate safe and orderly migration and integration between neighboring countries.

Project Publication: <u>Re-thinking the Security Situation in Mali</u>

This report analyzes the cycle of failed peace agreements in Mali, which collapsed three times after failing to deliver promises of political decentralization and economic assistance to the poorer regions in the rural north. BIC argues that these strategic failures are compounded by significant abuse and provocation by national security services, which works to alienate the public in the central and northern regions. In order to break this cycle, the Malian government should engage a wider base of local leaders in the peace process, launch judicial support teams to boost accountability in conflict areas, and finance economic support packages to increase the cultivation of arable land for agricultural growth.

Project: Rethinking the EU-Africa Partnership

This research and advocacy project seeks to re-think European and global cooperation with Africa, specifically to address structural obstacles preventing economic growth and stability, such as weak regional integration, military accountability and illicit financial flows. The ultimate goal is to foster conditions that allow Africa to drive its own economic growth and security, which requires smarter, more adaptive partnerships that respond to new geopolitical challenges. Taking stock of the various security, migratory, and economic pressures rising in both Africa and Europe, the project examines how stronger multilateral cooperation and stronger governance may be able to underpin long-term solutions to shared challenges. This project has produced three research publications and one high-level advocacy event at the European Parliament, detailed further below.

Project Event: New Players on the Field: The Impact of Emerging Actors in Africa

BIC organized and moderated this closed-door round-table at the European Parliament, **bringing together 25 NGOs, Ambassadors, the United Nations Development Programme, and senior EU policy-makers**, in order to develop pragmatic approaches to address the geopolitical obstacles facing a successful EU-Africa partnership. Taking stock of the increasing presence of new actors in Africa, such as China and Russia, the event explored strategies to best leverage incoming foreign investment for maximum African benefit and local economic growth.

Keynote Speakers:
- **Ambassador Awad Sakine,** *African Union Permanent Representative to the European Union*
- **Ms. Barbara Pesce-Monteiro**, *UNDP Brussels Office Director*
- **Ambassador Birgitte Markussen**, *European External Action Service, Deputy-Managing Director for Africa*
- **Ambassador Marc Otte**, *BIC President, Vice-President of the European Institute for Peace*
- **Dr. Xinning Song**, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Renmin University of China, Professor*

Project Publication: The CFA Franc: Stabilizing Force or Colonial Relic in West Africa

While the CFA Franc has provided general macro-economic stability across West Africa for several decades, this report finds that its effectiveness is challenged by the region's poor economic integration and weak assimilation into global value chains. BIC investigates the empirical evidence behind the CFA franc, and evaluates the currency based on its ability to achieve the core objectives of any common currency: economic integration, convergence, and stability. Despite these flaws, BIC argues that the CFA franc should not be discarded completely, but rather reformed to better suit the diverse economic environments of its members. Most importantly, the CFA franc highlights the unproductive result of West African states' vertical integration into European economies, which has clearly stifled regional integration.

Project Publication: Chinese Engagement in Africa: Risks and Opportunities

China and other emerging actors are shifting global power structures, but understanding the challenges and opportunities at hand for the European Union requires a more critical analysis of broad narratives, which all too often present Africa as a homogeneous entity. BIC finds that broad claims that China's financing will distort African relations with traditional donors are largely overstated, but the decreasing aid dependency of key countries highlights the need for a new EU approach that emphasizes an equal-footing relationship and greater decision making to African leaders. In light of increasing corruption risks, the EU should seize the opportunity to promote strong governance to maximize sustainable competitiveness amongst African and European firms.

Project Publication: Lessons Learned from the 5th AU-EU Summit

Despite an abundance of media coverage, BIC's analysis highlights how the AU-EU Summit failed to deliver on several fronts, producing a final communique lacking concrete targets. The Summit underlined the tense debate over a future Europe-African partnership, and proved that in order to succeed, the EU must avoid colonial-era, transactional relationships, and instead build partnerships based on shared interests. Conversely, the AU is in need of institutional reforms to improve its capacity and efficiency. In order to serve as a balanced, political counterweight to the EU, the AU must be able to provide a clear, united message of its members' priorities. BIC emphasizes that this requires extensive mediation, intra-African political dialogue, and stronger relations with the regional economic communities.

Project: Phoebus

BIC's Phoebus project aims to connect professionals across cultural boundaries by sharing skills between local and refugee artisans. BIC hosts a series of workshops, bringing together local professionals and refugees with similar backgrounds, facilitating collaboration and a productive exchange of skills and knowledge. BIC's key role is to design a shared space for cross-cultural professional learning, and providing clear opportunities for contact, cooperation, and collaboration. By harnessing and sharing the professional skills of the local Brussels community, BIC helps to pave the way for refugee integration, promotes understanding between refugees and host country residents. BIC also works to capture lessons from Phoebus' workshops and facilitate understanding for how the EU can help employers boost refugee integration.

Project Event: "Phoebus Workshop Series"

BIC conducted a skills sharing and inclusion workshop focused on helping refugees meet other SMEs who share the same professional field. This project was able to help participants practice useful language skills, get essential business advice and forge social connections. **We launched this workshop in 2018 with a group of 12 tailors: 6 local and 6 refugees.** We have used the findings of our workshops to assist the growth and development of other projects. Through close collaboration with other organizations working in this area this project strives to contribute to the growth and innovation of migrant inclusion projects.

Project Event: "Exhibiting Inclusion- A world refugee day event"
In honour of this World Refugee Day, the Phoebus Project, hosted an interactive event with MEP Dietmar Koster, in Brussels, to explore the principles and practices of refugee inclusion within Europe. The event gave a platform for various Brussels-based organizations working with refugees to outline their work whilst having an opportunity to network and collaborate. Following a series of project presentations, an expert panel discussed the differing concepts of inclusion and integration in terms of refugee community engagement.

Participating organizations: *Four local organizations that support and defend refugees in Belgium, including* **Convivial, Cinemaximilian, Duo for a Job, and We Can.**

Project Publication: Phoebus produced 6 fundamental texts, including a industry specific phrase books, a guide for organizing and facilitating these workshops, and industry research packages. The team also conducts regular research into the factors affecting migrant integration by researching topics such as Belgian migration policy, detention practices, the Global Compact on Migration, and how refugees are being framed in media discourses.

- Fact Sheet on the end of the 'Migration Crisis' in Europe
- Belgium has returned to the old practice of detaining families
- Global Migration Management Strategies from the UN and EU

Collaborations: The Phoebus project first presented a concept for context specific learning in integration projects at the *"Migration and development: Human dignity in the refugee crisis"* conference held by the World Youth Alliance at the European Parliament in 2017. In 2018, the Phoebus project participated as a social entrepreneur and project leader in the "Social Hackathon Umbria 2018", where members of the Phoebus team led the rapid development of a digital tool designed to map out migrant services in a city, support coordination, and provide a centralized and up-to-date source of localized information for migrants relating to their rights and available services.
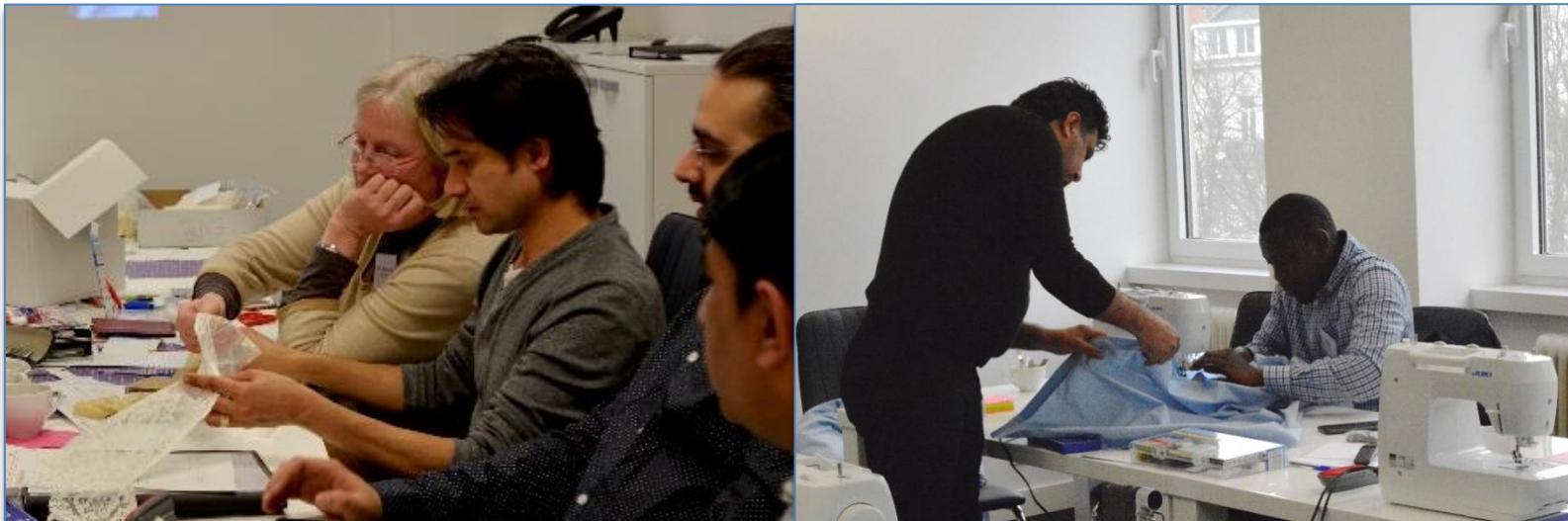
Project: Iran in the Middle East

This project examines the intersectionality of regional politics and conflict in the Middle East, specifically focusing on proxy clashes between regional hegemonies intersect with sectarian and local divergences. BIC seeks to provide contextual analysis to show how the weakening of states in the Middle East, in both economic and political terms, has played a key role in destabilizing the region by creating fixed struggles for regime survival. Our research goes further to illustrate how Iran's traumatic experience following the 1979 Revolution and Iraq-Iran War has pushed the new regime towards survival tactics that include building network of partners to contain external threats, and engaging in reckless proxy warfare abroad to protect its security, political and economic interests. The project focuses on how these dynamics poison relationships between regional and international actors complicating attempts for peaceful solutions.

Project Event: Reconciling the Gulf Diplomatic Crisis
BIC organized and moderated this high-level conference at the European Parliament, hosted by MEP and former French Minister Rachida Dati, in order to mobilize political action to combat the root causes of terrorism financing, and reflect on the appropriate European responses to the Gulf Diplomatic Crisis. In addition to discussing issues relating to the crime-terrorism nexus, participants outlined strategies to combat this issue through stronger transparency and accountability standards. Participants considered the historical context of the Gulf Cooperation Crisis, and warned against conflating terrorism with political opposition.

Keynote Speakers:
- **Dr. Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi**, *Chairman of Hedayah*
- **Mr. Joost Hilterman**, *International Crisis Group, Director Middle East*
- **Ambassador John Gatt-Rutter**, *European External Action Service, Head of Counter-Terrorism Division*
- **Mrs. Rachida Dati**, *Member of the European Parliament*

Project Event*: Iran's role in a Restless Middle East: Structuring a New European Stance*
BIC organized and moderated this high-level conference at the European Parliament, hosted by MEP Tunne Kelam, to facilitate a constructive conversation between experts and policy-makers on Iran's complex impact on the Middle-East's regional stability. The discussion focused on how the EU and the UN could better leverage their influence to mitigate the risk of conflict, human rights abuses, escalated proxy wars and a nuclear Iranian state. The event explored the ramifications of U.S. President Trump's decision to withdraw from the JPCOA, known as the Nuclear Deal.

Keynote Speakers:
- **Ambassador Marc Otte**, *BIC President, Vice-President of the European Institute for Peace, Belgian Special Envoy for Syria*
- **Ambassador Nicolas Suran**, *French Representative to the EU Policy and Security Committee*
- **Dr. Ethan Corbin**, *NATO Parliamentary Committee Director, Defence and Security Committee*
- **Mr. Jalil Sherhani**, *Secretary-General of the Democratic Solidarity Party of Alahwaz*

Project Publication: [The Political and Economic Crisis in Iran, and its Social Dimensions](#)
This research paper provides contextual understanding to Iran's current political and social climate, examining how it has been shaped by its history, identity, and economic structure. The article considers Iran's unique hybrid political system impacted its socioeconomic structure following the 1979 Revolution, which ultimately resulted in predictable rentier state practices illustrated by a network of institutionalized corruption. Ultimately, this hybrid system allowed space for the upper middle class to maneuver, it steadily eroded the broader middle class and created further socioeconomic cleavages and deteriorating living conditions. BIC argues that the most pressing threat to the regime's survival is internal strife driven by widespread discontent, social grievances, and the fading appeal of nationalist discourse.

Project Publication: [Stirring Up the Region for Survival: Iran's Role in the Middle East Proxy Wars](#)
This article examines Iran's crucial role in the shifting dynamics and power-balances in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. In each situation, Iran's support to reinforce Bashar al-Assad's administration, Huthi Militias in Yemen, and al-Hashd in Iraq illustrate how Iran has sought to maintain strategic military influence and direct war away from its borders, sometimes at the expense of broader regional peace and stability. By conducting proactive defense strategies through proxies, Iran protects its security, political and economic interests against geopolitical opponents such as Saudi Arabia, while also deviating attention away from its own domestic challenges. While audacious, this aggressive foreign policy is not sustainable, and detracts the viability of potential peace processes.

Project Publication: [The Syrian-Iranian Nexus: A Historical Overview of Strategic Cooperation](#)
This research article examines the historical development of the strong alliance between Syria and Iran, which has sustained itself through a shared perception of threat, a convergence of interests in Lebanon and Iraq, and a common perspective regarding Palestine, Israel, and the United States. This strategic partnership has been channeled through mutual economic, diplomatic and political assistance in meeting each others' strategic needs. This research provides a historical overview of forty years of military, economic and diplomatic cooperation and aims at understanding the forces that have shaped the alliance between the two countries.

Project Publication: [Qatar and Terrorism, A Dangerous Game](#)
This article provide clarity to countless allegations of terrorism financing leveraged against Qatar during Gulf Diplomatic Crisis. BIC's analysis highlights that terrorist financing is rarely black and white, and usually occurs indirectly through several organizations and individuals with varying degrees of extremist ties. Mounting evidence suggests that while Qatar's direct links to terrorist organizations remain blurry, the government has created a culture of impunity by which donations can be easily solicited to extremist groups and networks. Acknowledging that many of the numerous allegations against Qatar are undoubtedly politically motivated, BIC urges Qatar to strengthen its commitment and capacity to fight terrorism financing.

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Project: Themes of Conflict in the MENA Region

BIC's Middle East and North Africa research and advocacy project focuses on identifying and mitigating drivers of conflict, in the MENA region, specifically in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. This project focuses on highlighting the geopolitical, economic, and historical drivers of conflict and political instability, with a view towards producing innovative strategies to build sustainable peace. This includes research into the causes and effects of sustained forced displacement, resource competition, and radicalization, with a parallel focus on inclusive conflict resolution strategies. This research project also focuses on evaluating regional migration and refugee policies, and building coherence between human mobility, international law, and sustainable development. Our research has been showcased at the African Security Forum in Marrakech, Morocco; MEDays International Forum, Tanger, Morocco; and the Paris Peace Forum.

Project Event: [The EU in Libya: A New Migration Policy for Long-term Stability](#)

The BIC organized and moderated an expert round-table between **22 NGOs and international organizations** at the European Parliament, hosted by **MEP Dietmar Koster**, to discuss the impact of the EU's engagement in Libya. The event underlined short-term migration policies, including financing of armed groups, could undermine Libyan political cohesion and reinforce impunity. Participants, including representatives from the **International Organization for Migration** and the **Libyan Representation to the EU**, debated how to incentivize stakeholders towards peace, and how the EU could better respect its international legal obligations.

Keynote Speakers:
- **Dr. Violeta Moreno-Lax**, *Professor, Queen Mary University of London*
- **Ms. Bettina Rühl**, *Journalist and Africa Correspondent*
- **Ambassador Marc Otte**, *BIC President, Vice-President of the European Institute for Peace, Belgian Special Envoy for Syria*

Project Event: [Expert Round-table- Education and Youth Radicalization](#)

The BIC organized and moderated an expert round table between 20 NGOs and institutions at the Brussels Press Club to discuss how to better foster education to counter youth violent extremism. Participants discussed how to foster critical thinking skills, holistically address both formal and non-formal sectors, create engaging narratives, and offer constructive outlets like service learning and volunteering. The discussion also considered the role of education and community in creating various levels of identity, and the need to provide youth with non-violent methods to affect political change.

Keynote Speaker: **Maqsoud Kruse**, *Executive Director, Hedayah - the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism*

Participating organizations *(partial):* *European Commission, United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security, European Parliament Research Service, Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Policy Centre, European Network Against Racism, World Vision, European Network Against Racism, Lifelong Learning Program, CEV European Volunteer Centre.*

Project Publication: Libya: The EU's Policy of Migrant Containment
This research article critically examines the EU's response to humanitarian crises facing migrants and refugees in Libya, finding that while the EU's rhetoric advocates for better conditions for migrants, it's polices and financing are more concerned with preventing migrants from reaching EU territory. This strategy fails to address structural drivers of migration and forced displacement, and risks breaching international law. Furthermore, in the absence of adequate safeguards, financing provided by the EU to the Libyan coast guard and security services may contribute to further abuses. BIC urges the EU to respect its legal and ethical obligations, and adopt a more humane and strategic migration policy to prevent future tragedies.
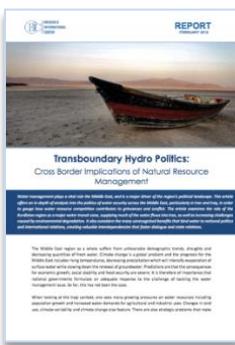
Project Publication: Transboundary Hydro Politics: Cross Border Implications of Natural Resource Management in the Middle-East
Water management plays a vital role the Middle East, and is a major driver of the region's political landscape. This article offers an in-depth of analysis into the politics of water security across the Middle East, particularly in Iran and Iraq, in order to gauge how water resource competition contributes to grievances and conflict. The article examines the role of the Kurdistan region as a major water transit zone, supplying much of the water flows into Iran, as well as increasing challenges caused by environmental degradation. It also considers the many unrecognized benefits that bind water to national politics and international relations, creating valuable interdependencies that foster dialogue and state relations.

Project Publication: UN Peace Agreements: Yemen 2018
This article examines the role of the United Nations peace agreements in conflict negotiation and mediation, and the recurring obstacles that have hindered its success in the MENA region. Using the 2018 UN-mediated Stockholm Agreement as a case study, this article considers how the absence of details and timeframe undermined the agreement's efficacy. The article considers how the various roles of the UN, which include international mediator, human rights defender, and peacekeeper, complicate the establishment of a process that all actors agree upon. The article considers that while formal Track I peacebuilding efforts leave room for improvement, the UN is highly effective in informal, Track II peacebuilding efforts that continuously engage CSOs, community leaders and women's groups.

Project Publication: Idlib: Sochi's Memorandum of Understanding
This article assesses the Russian-Turkish Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Idlib question, specifically by examining the challenges of its applicability and the ambiguity observed throughout much of its discourse. For example, the MoU agrees that all radical terrorist groups would be removed from the demilitarized zone by October 15, the lack of consistency between Russian and Turkish categorization of armed groups creates implicit challenges. The article also examines how the MoU will be perceived by the fighters in Idlib, and discusses their potential responses towards it. Finally, the article takes stock of previous agreements that might help in understanding to what extent will present and future agreements be honored.

Project: Democratic Development:

BIC's democratic development project focuses on the supporting the promoting the pillars of democratic governance, including freedom of expression, the integrity of electoral processes, and rule of law. Our researchers actively monitor developments ahead of, during, and following key elections in the Middle East and Africa, with the objective of noting potential obstacles to further democratic development. BIC aims to support stronger compliance with key international treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. This project envisions dedicating resources and capacity to an international election observation component, which would focus on reinforcing the integrity of electoral processes, exposing possible irregularities, and providing recommendations and best practices.
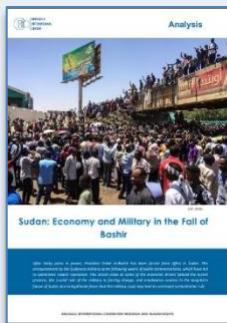
Project Publication: Sudan: Economy and Military in the Fall of Bashir

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.
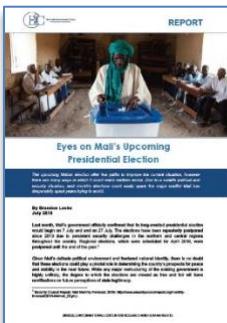
Project Publication: Eye's on Mali's Upcoming Presidential Election

The upcoming Malian election offer few paths to improve Mali's delicate situation, however there are many ways in which it could make matters worse. Given Mali's delicate political environment and fractured national identity, there is no doubt that these elections could play a pivotal role in determining the country's prospects for peace and stability in the near future. While any major restructuring of the existing government is highly unlikely, the degree to which the elections are viewed as free and fair will have ramifications on future perceptions of state legitimacy. In order to be successful, the government must strive to allow genuine competition from opposition parties, and prevent and post-election violence in the volatile northern and central regions of the country.

Project Publication: Tunisia, How Democratic Mismanagement Continues to Undermine the Economic Process

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. With the dates of the legislative and presidential elections set, it is crucial to assess the current state of affairs. This article examines the intertwined factors impeding economic restructuring in Tunisia, suggesting that without daring reforms, the elections are going to further exacerbate an already critical situation.
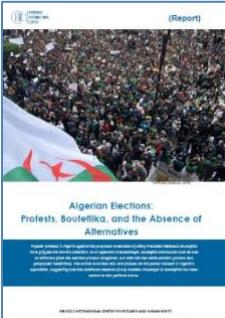
Project Publication: [Algerian Elections: Protests, Bouteflika, and the Absence of Alternatives](#)

Popular protests in Algeria against the proposed re-election of ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika have gripped the world's attention. In an apparent breakthrough, Bouteflika announced that he was to withdraw from the election process altogether, but with this the entire election process was postponed indefinitely. This article examines this, and focuses on the power vacuum in Algeria's opposition, suggesting that the continued absence of any credible challenger to Bouteflika has been central to this political drama.
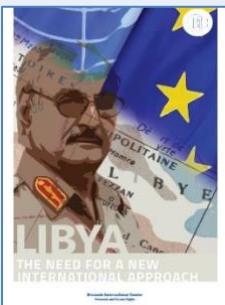
Project Publication: [Libya: The Need for a New International Approach](#)

This research article revisits the history behind the political polarization in Libya as well as the international efforts made to remedy the situation. BIC identifies recurring themes and failings in the post-revolution period in Libya, as well as in international efforts. The paper challenges the established roles of key international players such as the UN and European Union (EU), and critically assesses the suitability of the 2015 LPA in the current 2019 political environment in Libya.

Project: Rigid Boundaries: Gender and Violent Extremism

Seen through a broad historical and gender lenses, this project aims to understand the intractable, inter-connected questions concerning women and men`s agency and subjectivity in processes of violent extremism. The series, which contains 7 chapters, explores multiple themes, ranging from gender to security and from policy frameworks to initiatives being conducted on the ground. The project explores the influences of masculinity and femininity as a way to uncover the many layers of a conflict and its dynamics. Altogether, the Rigid Boundaries project advocates for a paradigm shift in the understanding of violent extremism; one that includes gender at the core of the phenomenon, while also calling for a multidimensional and relational understanding of gender relations.

Project Publication: [Chapter One – A Brief Historical Perspective](#)

Chapter one of the series walks through a brief snapshot of history, highlighting some cases when inflexible concepts of gender have overshadowed acts of violent extremism. As discussed throughout the paper, history is replete with examples of women who have committed acts of violence passively and actively. However, their acts are very often undermined, neglected or reduced to very entrenched stereotypes.

Project Publication: [Chapter Two: Unravelling the Concept of Gender](#)

This chapter provides a deeper analysis on gender norms and power dynamics in conflict. It argues that it is essential to overturn commonly held assumptions about gender and recognizes how social norms and non-linear constructions shape both men and women's social interactions in violent extremism. In addition, the chapter looks at the various UNSCR on Women, Peace and Security, especially 2242, which reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict, while stressing the relevance of including gender perspective in all UN's peace and security efforts.

Project Publication: [Chapter Three: Drivers and Motivations to Violent Extremism: Context Matters](#)
Chapter 3 provides an overview of the main classification frameworks for the drivers of violent extremism, namely structural motivators, individual incentives and enabling factors. It highlights that there is no deterministic assumption and general theory to explain the root causes of this phenomenon. These methods of identification also emphasize that contextual factors matter tremendously. In particular, this article argues that factors such as gender inequality, discrimination and gender-based violence may act as potential drivers in the process of women's radicalization, whereas social gender roles and expectations contribute to men's engagement.

Project Publication: [Chapter Four: From Theory to Action: Gender in the EU's Policy Framework](#)
Chapter 4 attempts to briefly situate the EU's initiatives and its normative frameworks on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), and demonstrates the extent to which gender is included or considered as a priority within them. It further provides the following recommendations: The EU needs to place a gender perspective at the core of its analysis, policies and programs, not as a complementary component; Programs need to connect with men and women at an equal level of engagement, while also recognizing the different aspects, needs and priorities for both; Academic research, policy and programs need to be more connected and explored more thoroughly to clarify the relevance of gender in VE and identify their common intersects

Project Publication: [Chapter Five – Nigeria: The Gender Dynamics of Boko Haram's Tactics](#)
This case study highlights how rigid concepts of gender roles are being used by armed groups, such as Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria, to enhance their activities on the ground. Findings: Boko Haram's tactics and ideology cast men in hypermasculine combat roles, which makes male recruits hold a sense of security in their gender norms. Because women were not considered to be a threat (women = peaceful; men = violent), the group placed their female combatants in strategic venues, such as in governmental-controlled areas to perpetuate their attacks more easily.

Project Publication: [Chapter 6- Different Pathways, Similar Motivations: Women in Daesh](#)
This chapter highlights the main trends, challenges and developments in women's integration in armed groups, such as Daesh, in Syria and Iraq. Women's roles in Daesh can be divided into three categories: Wives, mothers, teachers and doctors: playing a role as agents of 'state-building'; Recruiters, a core source of human management and for attracting new followers; and fighters. Although limited, women have more often been included in the front line of the conflict with a potential militant role.

Project Publication: [Chapter Seven: Local Women's Perspective on CVE: Breaking the Rigid Boundaries](#)
The closing chapter attempts to bring a more positive (possibly even hopeful) perspective on CVE by focusing on local programs and concrete and positive actions, which are already being operated, especially those promoted by women's organizations. It also explores the many challenges these organizations face, such as lack of security, funding and support.

Future Projects

Project: Conflict Resolution in Yemen

In 2019, the BIC will open a new chapter in its MENA conflict and security program, which will focus on a multidisciplinary, in-depth analysis of the on-going crisis in Yemen. The focus of this project will be on conflict resolution, with a localized approach to encourage international and local players to build on viable solutions for peace and conflict resolution. This project will feature a detailed mapping of local actors and interests, attempting provide comprehensive insights into the crisis by considering how traumas, both historical and recent, are affecting stakeholders. The project's publications will be structured in three parts, taking into the perspectives of each stakeholder: the international community, the UN recognized Hadi's government and the Huthis.

The key objective of this research publication will be to facilitate understanding, dialogue, and compromise between stakeholders, particularly by highlighting successful instances of cooperation and reconciliation in the midst of conflict. In BIC's view, concerned efforts are required to bring all parties to the negotiating table, which will mediating tensions amongst groups along the Southern region. This can be directly benefited by proliferating a better understanding of cooperative relationships and the development of local-based initiatives.

Project: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Project/Women Leaders Alliance

In 2019, the BIC will embark on a new, regional, multi-year initiative focused on promoting and enhancing the work of women's organizations and women leaders across Europe and the Middle-East. The Women Leaders Alliance will be the heart of BIC's continuous effort to advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS). This project will seek to mainstream gender throughout central tenants of conflict resolution and security studies, which is vital to building sustainable solutions and positive change. Using a gender lens helps us to broadly look at the nature, constitution, causes, practices, and consequences of conflicts.

Furthermore, the BIC will organize the Women Leaders League International Forum in Brussels (WLL), Belgium. The main objective of BIC's WLL international forum is to provide a platform where women leaders from Europe and the Middle-East discuss and share pragmatic and systematic solutions on how to further advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Project: Discourse Analysis on Migrant Inclusion

As discussions in the EU continue over the many questions surrounding the pathway to migrant inclusion, one issue is regularly brought up. Entrance into a community requires participation from both the migrants, and the local communities. We have pursued this research in order to better understand the discursive way in which migrants are being contextualized in the media in these three European countries.

This study offers a quantitative analysis of nine online newspapers from Germany, Spain and Belgium. Data has been gathered over a two month period to create a lexical database that can be regarded as whole, or observe lexical developments in the two months leading up to the elections. To carry on the quantitative analysis, we used was based on TXM, a digital tool that supports the statistical analysis of large volumes of text. Through creating a lexical corpus, we have codified recurring words and "lexical environments" of key words we specifically targeted. Reviewing the results against a literary review of previous analysis for each of the three countries will provide us with a point of analysis to how migrants are being presented. This work is to help better understand the ways in which migrants are being depicted to local populations, and how that depiction affects voting patterns and the political landscape.