

# 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).

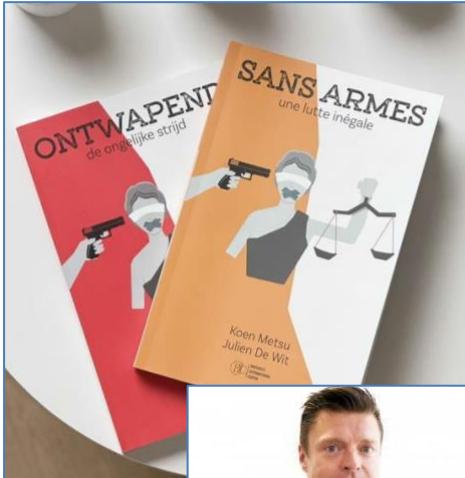
At the BIC, Shada collaborates as a Senior Commentator on Geopolitics, contributing to written commentaries on EU-MENA relations. Since joining, Shada Islam has co-authored an article focusing on gender and conflict: [Why the EU should put women front and centre of its new agenda for the Southern Mediterranean.](#)



# 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

**APRIL 2021**

**The Rise of Domestic Violent Extremism (DVE)**

- Why it will get worse before it gets better and with lessons for combating Violent Extremism Islam -

**AVERA - COMMENTARY**  
By Wim Van Lierde - Advisor of AVERA Department

**INTRODUCTION**

In March of the Federal Parliament in Belgium and BIC's adviser Koen Metsu's recent published book "Disarmed - An Unequal Battle", a sobering situation is pictured regarding the security situation in Belgium.

Not only is Islamic terrorism regressing and shifting tactics but is also spreading to an increasing number of other forms of extremism. This is a result of the rise of so-called domestic terrorism including radical right and left extremism, xenophobia, other radical movements, and organized crime. On top of that there is also an increasing number of so-called "radicalized individuals" who are radicalized through religious-based violence due to geopolitical, economic, climate and migration factors. Finally, the risk of nuclear- bio- and cyberterrorism remains real.

The recent published Annual Threat Assessment Report of the US Intelligence Community confirms these trends.

[1 https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/ATAS-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/ATAS-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf)

Wim Van Lierde | Advisor of AVERA Department  
Brussels International Center

**MARCH 2021**

**Metamorphoses of Terrorist Groups and Their Strategy in Europe**

**AVERA - COMMENTARY**  
By Brothim Luyckx - Head of AVERA Department

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Social study researchers are regularly blamed for failing to update and contextualise their reports on extremist groups to new developments occurring locally, regionally and internationally that continuously keep reshaping and evolving the jihadist movement. As a result there is a significant risk that their network analysis is based on incomplete and outdated models and data, leading to wrong conclusions and faulty risk assessments.

Correct assessment can only come from an up-to-date, complete and correct representation of data. In order to contribute to this, the Brussels International Centre for Research is aiming to update some of its previous papers and research, to include the latest and recent developments and to synthesize real-time data and new insights regarding topics related to Extremism and Violent Radicalism.

While – generally speaking – the same theoretical frameworks for studying Extremism and Violent Radicalism remains valid, it is important to incorporate the constant evolution of their use of new media, new technologies and operations that are in line with the evolution of local and international sentiments, law enforcement, developments in society and specific events.

These constant transformations are unfortunately absent from many studies despite being crucial to comprehensively analyze, understand, anticipate and

Brothim Luyckx  
Brussels International Center

**FEBRUARY 2021**

**How Can We Detect Extremist (Islamic Inspired) Discourse and How to Tackle It?**

**AVERA - COMMENTARY**  
By Brothim Luyckx - Head of AVERA Department

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Following the string of terror attacks in Europe and other parts of the world many countries, one of the strategic local and supra-local authorities have been focusing on as part of their prevention strategy, is to put in place an early detection system to signal signs of radicalism and violent extremism (EV) as occurring for example in the discourse taking place in cultural associations, sport clubs, educational institutions, and other public spaces.

In this article we want to focus on how to recognize such extremist discourse by introducing this a modus operandi. Again from the use for intelligence gathering, being able to understand the slippery slope towards Islamic radicalism is also key to developing educational programs in schools, mosques and the media to counter the narrative in an early stage.

As BIC our observation is that much more can and should be done in this particular area. This in particular the case towards the younger population in Europe, which according to the UN those under 24 making up 40% of the world population, and

<https://under25s.unesco.org/birthplace-linked-extremism-radicalism>

Brothim Luyckx  
Brussels International Center

# 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:

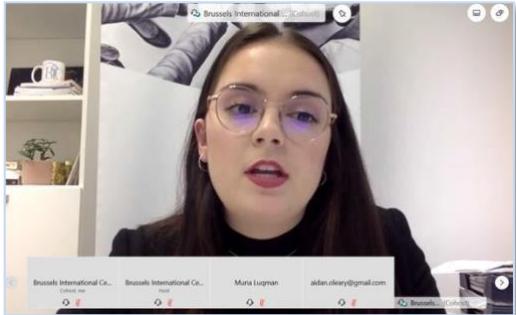
- **Ambassador Angel Losada**, EU Special Representative for the Sahel
- **Mr. Karounga Keita**, Director Sahel Office, Wetlands International
- **Ms. Delina Goxho**, Security Analyst on Protection of Civilians and Remote Warfare in the Sahel, Open Society Foundations
- **Mr. Mauro Lorenzini**, Head 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**

Identifying opportunities for Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan to reach a sustainable and peaceful compromise while addressing environmental, social and economic challenges.

By **Wael Elmaghrabi**  
Political Analyst for North Africa



**RETHINKING  
INTEGRITY  
IN  
2020 JERES**

**Introduction:**

Egypt's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project could be a central project to stimulate regional growth and development while creating social and economic benefits of peace. However, the project poses a threat to downstream, neighbours in Sudan and Egypt, due to its size, location and potential of drought and concerns over safety. This case has been a source of tension and conflict between the three countries, and has been a source of disagreement among international bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). However, there are several options available to mitigate the negative impacts of the project for all parties involved, which require a sustainable and peaceful compromise that respects the best interests to seek a peaceful resolution to this issue. This paper will explore the potential impacts of the predicted impacts of climate change and propose a sustainable and peaceful compromise between all affected states to tackle these shared issues together.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Ethiopia's GERD project poses profound risks to Egypt and Sudan, particularly regarding water availability and environmental degradation.
- The role of the current political leaders, particularly the GERD, in addressing the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation.
- Sufficient adequate for all interests involved, including environmental, social, and economic solutions, such as coordinated water management, climate resilience, and climate change adaptation.
- Long-term, sustainable, and peaceful cooperation will be the key to a better future for the Nile Basin states.

## 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.

**Introduction:**  
On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020 in Juba, Sudan's transitional government made significant and historic progress in concluding a set of peace talks with various rebel groups. The outcome of these negotiations has rightly been internationally heralded as a great and important achievement, especially in the context of the long-standing and violent conflict of Omar al-Bashir. However, 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 some of the strict self-imposed deadlines, time will be of the essence in implementing these accords in a fair and balanced matter. Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok will face more key decisions in the months and years to come.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- The 2020 Sudanese peace agreement is not a composition of several separate agreements between the government and various rebel groups.
- There are a few technical challenges with the implementation of the agreements from all parties, including the issues of funding and timelines.
- Implementing the agreements will be difficult given the presence of spoiler groups, the lack of political will for the agreements, and pre-existing problems between the government and other actors.
- Moving forward, more effort should be made to ensure that all issues are represented in the process.

## Sudan's 2020 Peace Agreements: What Has Been Achieved And What Remains Outstanding

October 2020

On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020 in Juba, Sudan's transitional government made significant and historic progress in concluding a set of peace talks with various rebel groups. The outcome of these negotiations has rightly been internationally heralded as a great and important achievement, especially in the context of the long-standing and violent conflict of Omar al-Bashir. However, 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 some of the strict self-imposed deadlines, time will be of the essence in implementing these accords in a fair and balanced matter. Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok will face more key decisions in the months and years to come.

**INTRODUCTION**  
The concept of environmental racism has been popularized in recent years with the new visibility and high politicization of the climate change problematic. Born 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. Climate change is a growing concern in the region, threatening the socioeconomic and ecological livelihoods of millions. Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are among major oil and gas producers in the region, and are also major recipients of foreign investment, often tied to the Maghreb's contribution to addressing climate change. These factors overshadowing affect the countries' poorest regions, in which, ironically, most of natural wealth is located. This disparity can be conceptualized as environmental racism, a process through which an area's resources does

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Conflicting Environmental Racism arises from the Global North's interest in the Maghreb's natural resources and its desire to maintain its economic and political influence.
- The role of the European Union remains unclear, as it has not yet taken a stance on the issue, despite its responsibility for the political decisions at the EU level.
- The safety of military personnel should be continually re-evaluated as the dynamics between the US and Iran impact the security of foreign military personnel in Iraq.

## 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

**INTRODUCTION**  
Since the end of October 2019, a series of more than 25 different missile and rocket attacks have taken place against US and UK military bases in the northern part of the country. None of these attacks have been claimed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), but most of the attacks to date have been claimed by the US and UK, and some have been attributed to the Houthis, a terrorist group by the United States. These attacks have been carried out by Iran and its proxies, specifically as military personnel have been withdrawn from Iraq, and as a response to the US withdrawal from the region, as well as to improve the capacity of the Iranian military.

The European Union has remained largely absent in responding to these ongoing attacks, which only highlights the disconnect between the Member States' actions abroad and the political responses from the EU institutions.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Irakian 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 unclear, as it has not yet taken a stance on the issue, despite its responsibility for the political decisions at the EU level.
- The safety of military personnel should be continually re-evaluated as the dynamics between the US and Iran impact the security of foreign military personnel in Iraq.

## Ongoing Missile Attacks in Iraq: Targeting Foreign Troops and Exposing EU Absenteeism

March 2020

Irakian 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 unclear, as it has not yet taken a stance on the issue, despite its responsibility for 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

By Elisa Cherry  
Middle East Analyst

POLICY BRIEF | JUNE 2020 | RETHINKING SECURITY IN 2020 SERIES

**Introduction:**  
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 Kadhimí 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.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- The new Kadhimí 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.
- 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.
- External actors such as the European Union, United States, and United Nations, and Prime Minister Abadi, have been instrumental in pushing the demands of the protesters and improving the public wellbeing in the face of COVID-19.

## 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 Kadhimí 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**

Discussion Paper of the Brussels International Center: Humanitarian Aid Response Plan: Biometric Technology and Civilian Security

Version 0.1, October 2020

By Elisa Cherry  
Middle East Analyst

POLICY BRIEF | OCTOBER 2020 | RETHINKING SECURITY IN 2020 SERIES

**DISCUSSION**

On 8 October 2019 the Brussels International Center hosted a roundtable with international, local and field-based experts to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The main focus 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 sustainable and effective aid possible.

aid. In an efficient and effective manner, collaboration with local partners provides humanitarian organizations with vital local knowledge as well as a network to access more vulnerable populations. There are also challenges for humanitarian aid organizations to work with local actors. These challenges need to be considered and ultimately addressed in order to maintain the trust of local actors and the effectiveness of aid workers and organizations that are working to provide aid to the most vulnerable people in Yemen.

## 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**

The Rise of Iraq's Elite-backed Security Forces, the Popular Mobilization Forces

By Elisa Cherry  
Middle East Analyst

POLICY BRIEF | DECEMBER 2020 | RETHINKING SECURITY IN 2020 SERIES

**Introduction:**  
The Iraqi security sector has been under extreme pressure to carry out reform since the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. The international community has created innumerable time and resources to support the reform of the Iraqi security sector, yet has failed to enact a policy that truly addresses the challenges of the Iraqi security sector. In the armed forces of Iraq control of the military is concentrated in the hands of a few dozen of paramilitary groups with varying alliances and goals. The most powerful paramilitary group is the Hashid Shaabi, or the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) or Hashid al-Shaabi. The Hashid al-Shaabi played a major role in the battle against the Islamic State (IS) and now has become a major political player within the security sector as international actors continue to impose reforms.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- 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.

## 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**

**RETHINKING SECURITY IN THE 2020s SERIES – POLICY BRIEF**  
By Elisa Cherry – Middle East Analyst

**1. INTRODUCTION**

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. This paper aims to analyze the situation in Yemen, and to move beyond the point where they have become synonymous with the severity of the dire situation. Yemenis continue to suffer in direct effect from the conflict, but rather than blaming the Houthi rebels, the Yemeni government, or the international institutions, this paper aims to move the focus to the conflict itself. This paper also analyzes into the impact of the conflict on the humanitarian situation. Simply reading the statistics of the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen has not been a sufficient analysis.

All organizations and international organizations have failed to come to their donations in recent years. The United Nations stated that in 2019 the international community donated \$1.6 billion of the requested \$4.2 billion, nearly reaching the funding goals, considering that the amount of people reached by international aid

Causes of the Crisis | Elisa Cherry  
Brussels International Center

## 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 Houthi 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.**

**RETHINKING SECURITY IN THE 2020s SERIES – COMMENTARY**  
By Elisa Cherry – Middle East Analyst

What began in March 2011 as peaceful protests against President Bashar Al-Assad quickly escalated into a civil 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.

See more: Raqqa's Residents Wonder Who Their Next Ruler Will Be | Elisa Cherry  
Brussels International Center

## 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?**

**RETHINKING SECURITY IN THE 2020s SERIES – SPECIAL COMMENTARY**  
By Amb. Marc Ote – BIC President

On January 15, President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree to hold three elections this year. Palestinian Legislative Council on Saturday, 22/01/2021, President of the State of Palestine on Saturday, 31/01/2021, the Palestinian National Council on 13/02/2021. The former several statements of intention he has expressed in a recent past. The first aim is no doubt to restore the legitimacy of the Palestinian leadership in the eyes of Palestinians and international public opinion. Will this round of successful lead to a resumption of negotiations with Israel? The answer is not clear. Quite a lot of uncertainty will have to be overcome on the political and practical levels.

First, will elections happen? Holding PA elections for the approximately 5.2 million Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) will be difficult in itself. There may be a lot of Israeli supporters of the PA who are not willing to vote for it. The international political factors about rules and procedures is not yet clear. It will be even

Palestinian Elections: A Key to a Return to Negotiations of a Peace with Israel | Marc Ote  
Brussels International Center

## Palestinian Elections: A Key to a Return to Negotiations of a Peace with Israel?

March 2021

BIC's President Ambassador Ote 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.



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