

## Welcome \ **Conrad Schetter**

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### **International academic conference “Facing Organised Violence—Research Agendas and Conversion Potentials”**

Dear Madam Minister Svenja Schulze,

Dear Mr. Thomas Goebel,

Dear Jakob,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues and friends,

I cordially welcome you to the celebration of the 20th anniversary of BICC—the Bonn International Center for Conversion. It is a great pleasure for me to stand here in front of you and open this academic conference on “Facing Organised Violence—Research Agendas and Conversion Potentials”.

It is a particular honour to also welcome former directors, staff members and companions of BICC such as Herbert Wulf, Michael Brzoska, Sami Faltas, Kees Kingma or Corinna Hauswedell.

Ladies and gentlemen,

BICCs vision is a more peaceful world! Against this background we have identified “Organised Violence” as the overarching theme for the conference on the occasion of BICC’s 20th anniversary. We chose this topic for several reasons. First, research and policy have realised that the complex puzzle of violent conflicts can no longer be understood by applying a hermetic grid of definitions and differentiations:

We are hardly able to differentiate clearly between “war” and “peace”, between “interstate wars” and “civil wars” or any other kind of bipolar ascriptions. You can even ask yourself whether we have ever been able to differentiate in that way.

And it does not stop there: All attempts in the last two decades to define conflict dynamics with labels such as “new wars” or “fragile/failed states”, or recently “ungoverned spaces”, fail to include contradicting trends, such as the continuing existence of conventional forms of warfare:

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- the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008,
- the current situation in eastern Ukraine
- or the repeated sabre-rattling between China and Japan, India and Pakistan or Thailand and Cambodia.

These conflicts all show that the times of military confrontations between nation states are not over. On the contrary: We can observe the concurrence of diverging patterns of organised violence today.

Second, the complexity of wars and direct involvement have become more and more obvious. Refugee movements, commodity chains or the exploration of extractive resources such as gold, oil and diamonds show that wars—even if they are located somewhere at the fringes of the modern world—have a direct impact on our daily lives and make us part of such conflicts. The ongoing war in Syria and Iraq illustrates in many ways how organised violence has a direct impact on our society and vice versa:

- a) We witness that thousands of Jihadists from Europe and the United States are fighting side by side with militants of so-called Islamic State. This has stimulated a public debate about what went wrong in Western societies. Why do citizens get attracted to go to war and to celebrate extreme violence?
- b) The mass flight of refugees from Syria has become a pressing theme for national and local politics across Europe. The phenomenon of refugees is no longer an abstract one. Society and politics have to find quick solutions for providing support.
- c) We have to keep in mind that over the last decades Western industries have exported arms to the Middle East, which today are used for warfare. Western governments share a responsibility for the creation of the most militarised region in the world—as the latest data of the Global Militarisation Index show, which is annually published by BICC.

The complexity of wars does not only mean that we are facing the externalities of war and organised violence in our daily lives. But it also shows that we have to realise that we cannot distant ourselves from such wars.

This brings me to my last point. We find blunt acts of violence disturbing and shocking when they appear in real life. Our society eclipses violence from real life, but tends to experience and even enjoy violence in virtual life: In our high-tech world social media, computer games, movies and videos have become the modern platforms, not to say battlefields, of heroic warfare.

In full contrast, physical violence disappears in our real life. It becomes stigmatised. Moreover we are facing the tendency to interpret violence and warfare as an indication

of processes of civilisation: On the one hand we see the disturbing pictures of the beheadings of hostages or stoning of women in Syria and Iraq, posted on social networks. There is even a recent tendency in the public to connect such forms of violence directly with the religion of Islam—neglecting the atrocities inflicted in the name of Christianity, the modern nation states or racism in the 20th century.

On the other hand, we feel emotionally relieved by modern technologies of warfare, as operated by modern armies. “Surgical” interventions and the use of the latest technology make us believe that only the “real evil” is targeted and that collateral or civil damage is minimised. In believing that it is possible to limit violence and the human factor to a large extent we gain the impression that we are able to “clean” or to “civilise” war.

When I mention the three dimensions, namely

- a) our limited ability to cope and categorise organised violence
- b) the un-bounding and complexity of organised violence, which influences our daily lives, and
- c) the way of how violence is framed by value and norm systems,

I only intend to give some hints why BICC feels that organised violence is a pressing theme today.

Moreover, the setting of the theme “organised violence” gives us the opportunity to reflect on the road BICC has travelled over the last 20 years. BICC is a unique institute at the crossroads between research as well as policy and technical advice. BICC integrates applied and policy-relevant research with the concrete knowledge exchange with policymakers, practitioners and the public. This is what we call the knowledge circle.

BICC was established by the state of North-Rhine Westphalia in 1994 as the only Center for Conversion worldwide. At that time the main challenge was to cope with the overwhelming military surplus of the times of the Cold War: Bases, arms depots, nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons had to be converted or destroyed not only in Europe and Russia, but across the world. Other questions were the demobilisation and reintegration of military staff, and the conversion of arms industries and military research. At that time, BICC became the spearhead of conversion. BICC’s *Conversion Survey*, published between 1995 and 2005, was then one of the most prominent sources for Conversion Studies.

If you take the time to read BICC’s new *Concept Paper* you will find out that most of these themes are just as relevant today as they were 20 years ago. They are still at the core of BICC’s research agenda, although the outside appearance—that is the corporate identity and with it BICC’s logo and publication design—has recently changed.

Today BICC understands *Conversion Studies* as the critical and policy relevant engagement with the dynamics, and the changes, of organised violence. Organised violence manifests itself both in armed conflicts as well as in their preparation. This is

why *Conversion Studies* at BICC include themes such as discourses of war, civil–military relations, the production, trade, control and destruction of small arms and light weapons as well as the mobilisation and demobilisation of combatants, and direct acts of violence.

This broadening of the perspective links present *Conversion Studies* with its past tradition, which focussed strongly on the military, military industry and public defence budgets. At the same time, this understanding aims to overcome the two main shortcomings of the classical understanding of conversion. These were

- (a) the domination of mono-causal pre-assumptions and
- (b) the understanding of the transformation from military to the civil as a linear process.

In a nutshell, BICC defines conversion as any change of organised violence that responds to the problem that it poses to society as a whole. Hereby BICC emphasises particularly the embeddedness of organised violence in social contexts.

From this point of view, *Conversion Studies* draw attention to the ways in which organised violence translates into:

- (a) Concepts,
- (b) Means, and
- (c) Practices.

These three dimensions are interwoven with each other. No single one can be investigated without considering the other ones. For the sake of research, the separation into these three dimensions is beneficial as different objectives, theories, methods and approaches come to the fore.

Against this background it is not surprising that the conference programme's structure is based on our new concept and on the three dimensions, which we have elaborated there.

“Concepts” address any attempts that seek to either legitimate or de-legitimate expressions of organised violence, whether this relates to the build-up or reduction of military forces or to the actual use of physical force. A conceptual approach arises from a consideration of *discourses*. After the keynote by Carolyn Nordstrom, the morning session on “Discourses of War” will discuss current interpretations of war and the—often concealed—world views and belief systems these interpretations are based on. Although “going to war” is delegitimised in public discourses or is seen as the *ultimo ratio*, one might provocatively ask if—on the theoretical level—wars are not utterly needed to appreciate the absence of war.

After the lunch break we will discuss “Means of Organised Violence”. Means refers to instruments and material infrastructure of organised violence—such as defence

industries, battle tanks and aircraft carriers, small arms and light weapons or military bases. Our starting-point of research is the *physical artifact*.

In this session, you will have the opportunity to participate either in the panel on “Small Arms and Light Weapons” or in the panel on “Arms Industry.”

In the first panel experts with extensive experience from the field will discuss possible ways ahead for improving arms control. In this context allow me to draw your attention to the just published *BICC Annual Report*. There, BICC-staff member Elvan Isikozlu critically questions whether the timing, the concepts as well as the stated and unstated goals of arms control are indeed the right ones. This panel will take place on the first floor, in the Joseph Schumpeter Hall.

In the parallel panel “Arms Industry”, which will take place here in the Wolfgang Paul Hall, we will be contributing to the recent public, heated debate about the need of having a defence industry—and the need to determine its terms and conditions—in Germany and in the European Union.

“Practices of Organised Violence” constitute the third pillar of *Conversion Studies*. Concepts and means coalesce into visible behaviour, which includes the formulation of normative rules and the constitution of different actor-types.

Practices can relate to strategies of mobilisation and demobilisation as much as to actual acts of violence themselves such as rape, murder or torture. In the panel discussion we will address several regions of conflict—from the Balkans via Western Africa and the Horn of Africa to Afghanistan. We will, moreover, discuss different aspects of practices, ranging from the production of knowledge to the question of the internal and external mobilisation of militias.

Besides concepts, means and practices, BICC has identified two intersecting topics for its future research: “Natural Resources” and “Migration”. Both are politically highly relevant themes, in which we can reveal exemplarily the manifestation of organised violence. Tomorrow morning we will address both topics. Benedikt Korf will discuss the relationship between climate change and civil wars. Paula Banerjee will focus on the interface of migration and violence in the Indo-Bangladesh border region. Please remember that tomorrow’s session will take place in the Festsaal of the main building of the University of Bonn.

We will conclude the conference with a closing panel, in which we hope to be wiser than we are now. While this conference, for sure, will not be able to reinvent the wheel, my hope is that we will gain a few new insights and, much more importantly, some new puzzling questions.

Tonight you are cordially invited to join our public event—in German but with simultaneous translation. We will be discussing the future of military intervention between responsibilities and interests.

Before I give the floor to Minister Svenja Schulze, I would like to convey my thanks

- first of all to the state of North-Rhine Westphalia, to your ministry Minister Schulze. The state established BICC 20 years ago and since then has accompanied the institute through thick and thin. And much more importantly, it provided the Center with core funding over the last 20 years. We are deeply thankful for that generous support and hope that the state of North-Rhine Westphalia will continue for another 20 years.
- I would also like to mention the many friends and companions of BICC during the last two decades. Without you, BICC would never have become such a great place to work as it is now. You will see some of them as participants in the panels in the next two days.
- For their support of this conference my thanks go to
  - o the Foundation for International Dialogue of the Savings Bank in Bonn
  - o and to the US-General Consulate in Düsseldorf.
- My thanks also go to the University of Bonn and the Uniclub that have supported us in the preparation of this conference.
- In particular I would like to thank the Rector of the University Bonn, Jürgen Fohrmann, for his great support—unfortunately he is unable to join the conference today.

With this, let me pass the microphone on to Minister Svenja Schulze. Thank you.