

Conflict Weekly

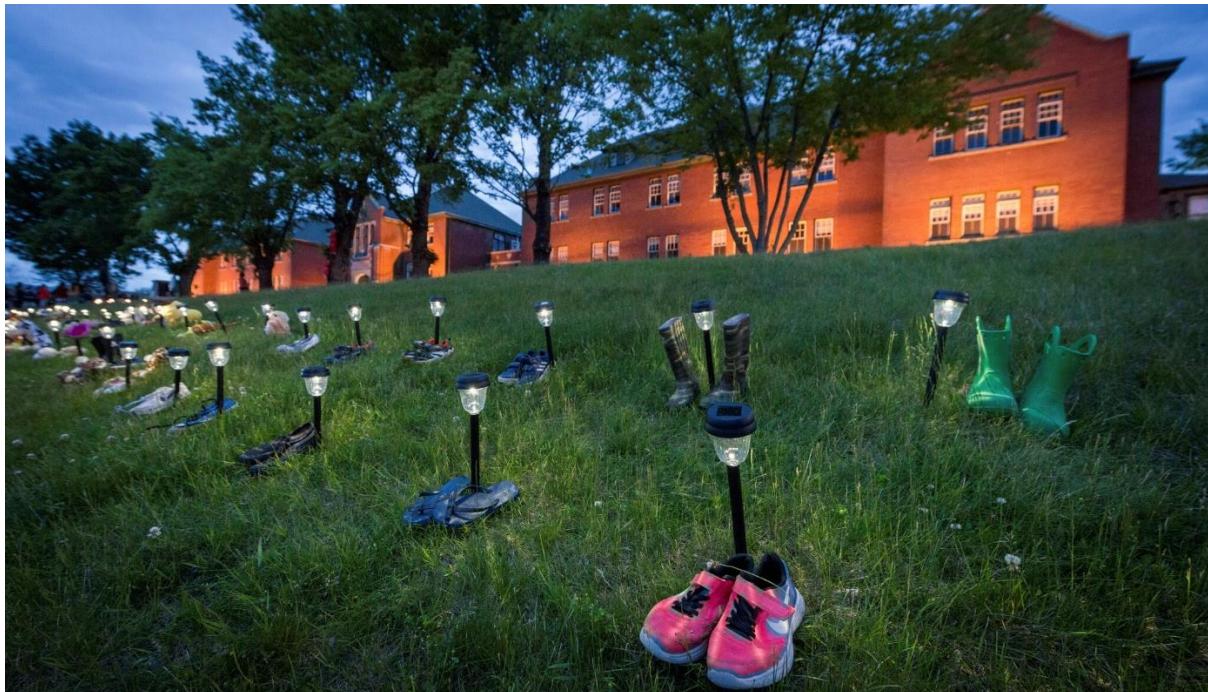
An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

28 July 2021, Vol.2, No.17

France's anti-extremism bill, Canada's burning churches, and Tunisia's new political crisis

Sourina Bej, Wonchibeni Tsopoe and Anu Maria Joseph



Memorial at a former Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada where the remains of 215 children were discovered. (Image Source: NYT/Dennis Owen/Reuters)

France: Parliament passes bill aimed at checking Islamic extremism

In the news

On 23 July, the French Parliament passed the bill strengthening the government's role to check mosques and other religious organizations as part of its fight to prevent Islamic radicalism and defend the republic. The 'Law Reinforcing Respect of the Principles of the Republic' was passed by the National Assembly with 49 votes in favour, against 19. Also known as the anti-separatism bill, it was first approved by the lower house on 16 February 2021.

Issues at large

First, the bill in brief. The passed bill empowers the government to permanently close houses of worship, dissolve religious organizations without a court order, if their members are found to be inciting hatred. Religious organizations will now have to get government permits every five years to continue operating; also, they would need annual certification of their accounts if they receive foreign funding. The bill makes it a criminal offense for anyone, in the name of religious ideology, pressures civil servants, and other public-service providers to deviate from French secular values. Unauthorized posting of someone's personal details to expose them to harm is punishable with EUR 45,000 and up to three years in jail. The passed bill also mandates parents who home-school their children to obtain government authorization to ensure their children are taught the right French secular values.

Second, France's struggle with Islamic extremism. The new law comes in the immediate background of strings of terrorist attacks. In October 2020, a middle-school teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded after the father of one of his students posted a video online complaining about the teacher's decision to display cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad to his class. The attacker, an 18-year-old Chechen refugee, acted after seeing the video. Two weeks later, a Tunisian man killed three with a knife at a church in Nice. The attacks remain those incidents where the French laïcité (secularism) was seen by the larger French society to be in direct conflict with one's religious norms, especially Islam. Macron has since politicized the attacks and called Islam to be in crisis. The law attempts to legalize and uphold Paty as a symbol of free-thinking French who has been under attack from the Islamic radicals.

Third, Macron's attempt at reinterpreting French laïcité. The bill framed by Macron at the outset aims to respond to the spread of Islamist extremism. But at its core, it is a State's exceptional attempt at solving the problem of extremism with another extreme of creating parallel societies where civic laws will take precedence over personal freedom to practice ones' own religion. Called laïcité, it is a strict separation of religion and State wherein to be a French secular means absence of religious symbol in public space. The law re-enforces laïcité as political and social anxiety towards Islam.

Fourth, public support for the law. Macron's course correction of illiberal elements in the French society through security and legal means has public support. The anguish and exclusionary remarks favouring the burkini or headscarves ban is a larger public expression of how Muslims remain alienated in French society. Passing the bill, further provides a social space to the project of homogenizing the republic where being French cannot coexist with simultaneous religious identities.

In perspective

Macron, in passing the bill, formalized the ground for the popularity of conservative politics with favouritism of one's national historicity. The right-wing opposition Republicans (LR) party and the far-right National Rally have both called for more restrictions on Islamism. However, the new law is the first attempt by a Western liberal democratic republic at legalizing the socio-political alienation of its minority by its ethnic majority.

Canada: Burning churches, and the indigenous community issue over a painful past

In the news

On 19 July, a Coptic Orthodox church burned to the ground in British Columbia, as the burning of churches continues in Canada following the recent discovery of graves of indigenous children. According to Toronto Sun reports, more than 50 churches were vandalized, and five Catholic churches were razed during the last few weeks.

On 3 July, the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, denounced the burning and vandalism of Catholic churches. On 6 July, Mary Simon the first indigenous Canadian governor-general made an address in her first language, Inuktitut and promised to work towards healing the nation at what she described as an 'especially reflective time.'

Issues at large

First, the historical linkages to the current unrest. The fabric of Canada's nation-building has come at the expense of its indigenous people. The government's "National Policy" is believed to have given the authorization to establish residential schools to assimilate indigenous communities and to suppress their dissent. The schools were designed to isolate indigenous children from their families and cut all ties to their culture. The indigenous community needs better representation of their culture which the State fails to address.

Second, the recent revelation of the unmarked graves. Thousands of unmarked gravesites were uncovered, out of which 215 were graves of children. The children are believed to be students of Kamloops Residential School as the graves were found near the city of Kamloops in Southern British Columbia. Also, in June the Cowessess First Nation in Saskatchewan announced the finding of estimated 751 unmarked graves. Followed by 160 undocumented and unmarked graves near the Kuper Island Industrial School. The unravelling of more unmarked graves is leading to further unrest and uproar in the State.

Third, the indigenous uprising. Not only in Canada but also in other North American countries, there have been similar uprisings related to indigenous communities and their demands. Although these movements organize themselves to approach and tackle these issues may differ, the objective in all of these movements are similar; the right to preserve their culture and traditions and certain and other such rights.

In perspective

For years, the indigenous community has faced oppression. Canada, from its pre-colonial past until today, had aimed to undermine indigenous people identity. Discrimination against the indigenous community is deep-rooted, and the role of the State is very minimal in addressing these issues. Systemic racism has been continuing for decades, and the emotional baggage attached to it is rather hard to reconcile. The Canadian government has to take a proactive step to meet the demands of the indigenous community. Furthermore, reconciliation will be best

served only if the government works to implement and practice the laws that cater to the indigenous community.

Tunisia: New political crisis, as the President sacks the Prime Minister and dissolves the Parliament

In the news

On 25 July, several cities in Tunisia witnessed multiple clashes between the protestors and police. The young crowds shouted "get out" demanding the government to step down. The protestors cited the government's negligence in handling the recent spike of Covid-19 cases and the economic and social turmoil. On the same day, President Kais Saied dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspended the Parliament with the help of the military. He said: "We have taken these decisions... until social peace returns to Tunisia and until we save the state."

On 26 June, Rached Ghannouchi, the Speaker of the Parliament and the leader of the Ennahda party described the President's decision as "a coup against the revolution and the constitution."

Issues at large

First, the protests before the "coup". Protesters called out the collapse of the health system under the flaring pandemic and socio-economic turmoil. Covid-19 deaths in the country crossed 300 fatalities per day by mid-July. Only seven per cent out of the 12 million total population is fully vaccinated. On 8 July, the health ministry described the situation as "catastrophic" as the health system has "collapsed" under the strain of the pandemic. According to government data, the Tunisian economy had a nine per cent downturn this year. The National Institute of Statistics recorded an unemployment rate of 18 per cent. However, youth unemployment is above 30 per cent. Lack of opportunities with poor economic reforms and development inflamed the public under hard Covid-19 restrictions.

Second, the 'coup'. President Saied's decision to suspend the Parliament is termed a 'coup'. Being a semi-presidential system, Article 80 of the Constitution of Tunisia allows the President to assume executive power for 30 days in a situation of 'immense danger'. However, the Article says it is mandatory to consult with the Prime Minister and the Parliament Speaker. But, the constitutional court which was meant to settle the issue is still not established. Crucially, the 'coup' narrative is under debate.

Third, unstable government and power struggle. Even though President Saied and the Parliament were elected in 2019, it was only in August 2020, after multiple failed attempts, Mechichi took office and formed the government. Since then, the Ennahda party under Ghannouchi and President Saied continuously squabble over the cabinet reshuffling and the control of security forces. The fragile and short-lived governments stumbled to deal with the public grievances rather focused on internal struggles.

Fourth, Tunisia and the Arab Spring. Tunisia, which ignited the Arab spring in 2011, was regarded as the only success among uprisings. However, the economic crisis, political dissatisfaction and hangover of transition still haunt the country even after the ten years of revolution.

In perspective

First, Tunisians lost their faith in short-lived governments. As the focus goes back to the political struggles, there will be a further ignorance of the real issues that are essentially needed to be addressed. Second, but President Saied's efforts are the last hope for Tunisians. His power grab is an experiment on Tunisian democracy. Third, the 'coup' accusation by the opposition has now confused the public creating a fence between the supporters and the opponents. The confusion will potentially facilitate the ongoing protests.

Also, from around the world

By Apoorva Sudhakar and Abigail Miriam Fernandez

Peace and Conflict from East and Southeast Asia

China: Xi Jinping makes first official visit to Tibet

On 23 July, President Xi Jinping concluded his first official visit to Tibet which commenced on 21 July. During the visit, Xi met with military officials at Lhasa and outlined the need for "long-term stability and prosperity in Tibet." The Indian Express cited a Global Times news report which said that Xi called for "fully strengthening the work of training soldiers and war preparation." The call for preparedness came after Xi visited Nyingchi, a town near the border with India along Arunachal Pradesh.

South Korea-North Korea: Seoul, Pyongyang restore hotline after a year

On 27 July, South Korea's presidential Blue House announced that the country's hotline with North Korea had been restored in an attempt to mend bilateral ties. The President's press secretary outlined that the development came after the South Korean President and his North Korean counterpart had exchanged letters since April. He said: "The two leaders have explored ways to recover relations by exchanging letters on several occasions, and agreed to restore severed hotlines as a first step for that process," adding, "They have also agreed to regain trust as soon as possible and foster progress on relations again." Similarly, North Korea's state media said the restoration of the hotline was "a big stride in recovering the mutual trust and promoting reconciliation."

The Philippines: President praises controversial campaign against drug use

On 26 July, President Rodrigo Duterte delivered his last State of the Nation address wherein he spoke about his performance and highlighted his "drug war" policy. The said policy has been under scrutiny from international agencies; France24 explains that some rights groups estimate that "tens of thousands" have been killed under this policy whereas official figures say 6,000 have been killed. However, Duterte believes that the drug war has "led to the surrender of millions of drug dependents and neutralization, capture and prosecution of thousands of drug personalities." This was Duterte's sixth State of the Nation address as he has been barred from contesting elections in 2022; however, he has hinted at running for the post of vice president.

Myanmar: Military annuls 2020 election results; World Bank expects 18 per cent contraction in economy

On 27 July, The Irrawaddy reported that the military regime in Myanmar had annulled the 2020 election results in which Aung San Suu Kyi emerged victorious. The step has been perceived as another attempt by the regime to dissolve Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis following the February coup is worsening. On 23 July, The Irrawaddy reported that the UN aid meant for displaced people in Mindat town in Chin State is only accessible in areas permitted by the military. Therefore, the UNHCR "calls for the continued collaboration of all concerned to facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access in Chin State and across the country, so that no disruption to humanitarian work occurs." In another development, the World Bank estimates that the Myanmarese

economy will shrink by 18 per cent in the ongoing financial year (October 2020-September 2021). The above figure is a revision from its last estimate wherein the economy was expected to shrink by 10 per cent.

Peace and Conflict from South Asia

India: Farmers protests at Jantar Mantar, marking nine months of protests

On 22 July, farmers continued their protests against the farm laws brought in by the Centre for the ninth month as they took the march towards Jantar Mantar in New Delhi to hold their "Kisan Sansad." This is the first time since the march in January that the farmers have been allowed into the city. Meanwhile, inside the Parliament, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi along with his party and others staged a protest in front of Gandhi statue demanding repeal of the farm laws.

India: Assam-Mizoram border clashes leave five police personnel dead

On 26 July, five Assam Police personnel were killed and 50 others injured as Assam and Mizoram policemen opened fire at each other. The latest violence broke out after at least eight unoccupied huts were burnt down by unidentified persons on 25 July in the Kolasib district. The protracted border dispute between the two states stems from two border notifications resulting in the improper demarcation of the state border.

Afghanistan: Civilian causalities hit a record level, says UNAMA Report

On 26 July, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in its Midyear Update 2021 documented 5,183 civilian casualties (1,659 killed and 3,524 injured) between 1 January and 30 June 2021. Additionally, it notes that this is the first time that it has not attributed a single civilian casualty to international military forces. It stated that the conflict has now apparently become an exclusively civilian fight. The report warned that without a significant de-escalation in violence, Afghanistan will likely witness the highest ever number of documented civilian casualties in a single year since it began keeping records in 2009.

Pakistan: Over 40 Afghan soldiers granted safe passage, says ISPR

On 26 July, The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that the Pakistan Army had granted "refuge and safe passage" to 46 soldiers of the Afghan National Army and Border Police. The ISPR said that a local ANA commander had asked passage for the 46 soldiers because "they were unable to hold their military posts along [the] Pak-Afghan International Border due to [the] evolving security situation in Afghanistan."

Afghanistan: Taliban and others a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan, says UNSC Report

On 23 July, the 28th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, submitted to the United Nations Security Council states that Al Qaeda is present in at least 15 Afghan provinces, primarily in the eastern, southern and southeastern regions. The report also warned that TTP "continues to pose a threat to the region with the unification of splinter groups and increasing cross-border attacks." Additionally, it claims that the leaders of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan are trying to make fresh recruitment. Further, concerning

Afghanistan, the report notes that despite a US-Taliban peace deal, the security situation in Afghanistan "remains fragile, with uncertainty surrounding the peace process and a risk of further deterioration."

Afghanistan: the US to continue airstrikes as Taliban continues its offensive

On 25 July, General Kenneth McKenzie, head of the US Army Central Command stated that The US will continue airstrikes in support of Afghan forces fighting the Taliban's offensive. He said: "The United States has increased airstrikes in the support of Afghan forces over the last several days, and we are prepared to continue this heightened level of support in the coming weeks if the Taliban continue their attacks," adding, "The Taliban are attempting to create a sense of inevitability about their campaign. They are wrong." Meanwhile, President Joe Biden authorized up to USD 100 million from an emergency fund to meet "unexpected urgent" refugee needs because of the situation in Afghanistan, including for Afghan special immigration visa applicants.

Peace and Conflict from Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan: Shoot-out erupts following confrontations between residents along the border

On 24 July, shoot-outs erupted at a disputed region along the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border; one Tajik border guard was injured. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that the shoot-out began when "residents of the Tajik districts started cleaning an area near the border that Kyrgyzstan considers as undefined." Following this, Kyrgyz residents confronted the Tajiks which led to the two groups throwing stones at each other; the border guards intervened shortly leading to the shoot-out.

Iran: Droughts, water shortage spark protests in the southwestern province

On 26 July, Deutsche Welle reported that Iranians had taken to the streets in the Khuzestan province in the country's southwest, following months of drought and water shortage. The news report cited official sources who said that at least four people, including a policeman, had died in the demonstrations. Meanwhile, the Iranian government has resorted to internet shutdowns to disrupt communications between protesters. Amnesty International accused the security forces of using live ammunition at the protests which killed at least eight protesters across seven cities, as of 23 July.

Iraq: Biden announces end of combat mission; the US to train Iraq military

On 26 July, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi met US President Joe Biden for the first time for a strategic dialogue between the two countries. Biden announced that the US was ending its mission in Iraq by the end of 2021. He said: "Our role in Iraq will be ... to be available, to continue to train, to assist, to help and to deal with Isis as it arises, but we're not going to be, by the end of the year, in a combat mission." With the end of the mission, the US will now aim to train the Iraq military. Further, the US will also help fund a UN mission to monitor the elections in Iraq in October. In another development, Kadhimi announced that perpetrators of the bomb attack on the eve of Eid had been arrested.

Israel-Palestine: Military wing announces halving of the fishing zone off Gaza

On 25 July, the Israeli military wing dealing with civilian affairs, citing incendiary balloons launched from Palestine, announced that it had reduced the fishing zone off Gaza to six nautical miles from 12 nautical miles. Al Jazeera quoted from their statement: "The decision was made following the continued launching of incendiary balloons from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, which constitutes a violation of Israeli sovereignty." This development comes despite Israel's previous announcement on 12 July which provided for the expansion of the fishing zone and allowed for increased imports due to a "recent security calm."

Yemen: Saudi Arabia intercepts Houthi drones; Yemen government resists Houthi attack on Marib

On 24 July, Reuters reported that the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition claimed to have intercepted three drones launched by the Houthis towards the kingdom. Meanwhile, on 26 July, Arab News reported that the Yemen government forces, along with the coalition troops, had repelled the "biggest and most fierce" attack by Houthis on Marib on 25 July.

Ethiopia: Regional President calls on armed residents to mobilize against Tigray forces

On 25 July, the Amhara regional President called for a mobilization of all armed residents to fight the Tigray rebels terming the fight a "survival campaign." The regional leader said: "Starting from tomorrow (Monday), I call on all people of age who are armed either at governmental or private level to mobilize for a survival campaign." The development comes a week after Tigray forces entered the neighbouring Afar region. The Afar President had also called for a similar mobilization at the time.

South Africa: Death toll from riots climbs to 337

On 22 July, the government said that the death toll from the riots following the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma had climbed to 337. A minister from the presidential office said that 79 had been killed in Gauteng province and 258 in KwaZulu-Natal. Meanwhile, the economic loss from the riots is estimated to run into billions; in KwaZulu-Natal, the loss incurred has been recorded at USD 1.37 billion after "161 shopping malls, 11 warehouses and eight factories were extensively damaged."

Somalia: The US conducts second airstrike within two days

On 23 July, the US conducted its second airstrike against the al Shabaab extremists; the first strike under the Biden administration was conducted on 20 July. The second airstrike was conducted in central Somalia. The Pentagon said that the strikes were carried out to support Somali partner forces and were conducted in coordination with the Somali government.

Nigeria: Kidnappers release students, mothers and children in two states

On 25 July, a senior official from the Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna State said that kidnappers had released 28 teenagers who were among the 121 schoolchildren who were abducted on 5 July. The development comes after five students had previously escaped on 21 July. In a related development on the same day, Zamfara state government said that kidnappers had released over 100 women and children; the government denied paying any ransom.

Madagascar: Number of acutely malnourished children to rise fourfold, says UNICEF and WFP

On 26 July, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, in a joint statement, warned that the number of acutely malnourished children in Madagascar was expected to increase fourfold; this would include 110,000 children in severe condition and their growth and development would experience "irreversible damage." The WFP representative said: "What is currently happening in southern Madagascar is heart-breaking," adding, "We cannot turn our backs on these children whose lives are at stake." Similarly, the UNICEF representative said: "There is an urgent need to invest in the prevention and treatment of malnutrition in children to prevent the situation from becoming even more critical."

Peace and Conflict from Europe and the Americas

Hungary: Thousands take part in the Pride March in protests against anti-LGBTQ laws

On 24 July, Hungarians marched in Budapest's biggest Pride parade, amid tension sparked by a series of anti-LGBTQ actions by Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Organizers of the Pride march told demonstrators to stand up to the hatred of "power-hungry politicians" that were "using laws to make members of the LGBTQ community outcasts in their own country." This comes as Orban introduced a bill that protestors claim limits young people's access to information on LGBTQ rights and gender identities other than those assigned at birth.

BREXIT: UK rejects EU's Northern Ireland 'solutions'

On 26 July, the UK rejected the European Commission's proposals for "solutions" to ease trade friction between Northern Ireland and mainland Britain. Brussels set out in two non-papers for simplifying some aspects of the Northern Ireland Protocol which included guide dogs, tagging of livestock, taking animals to agriculture shows in Great Britain and permitting the re-import of EU food products that have been stored in Great Britain. However, the UK government spokesperson said: "The solution the EU has set out today remains the same as the one they sent to us in late June — the EU has not addressed the issues and concerns that we have raised with them."

Europe: South burns with wildfires as the North cleans up after floods

On 26 July, southern Europe continued to witness the spread of wildfires fuelled by hot weather and strong winds. In Greece, Italy and Spain fires have caused severe damage to property as firefighters continue to battle the flame. In contrast to the situation in the South, several regions in northern Europe cleaned up after torrential rainstorms lashed northern countries from Austria to Britain following the catastrophic flooding in Germany and neighbouring countries.

Europe: Anti-vaccine protesters hold rallies in France, Italy and Greece

On 24 July, thousands took to the streets across France in protests against the government's new COVID-19 vaccine policies. Under a new law which was adopted by the French Parliament, vaccination will become mandatory for health workers while citizens will need to bring in a health pass for most public places, including restaurants and cafes. Critics say the new legislation infringes on the freedoms of those who do not want to be vaccinated against

COVID-19. Similar protests were held in Italy and Greece to demonstrate against coronavirus restrictions and mandatory vaccination policies.

Cuba: Foreign Ministers condemn mass arrests

On 26 July, the foreign ministers of 21 countries in a joint statement condemned the mass arrests in Cuba and called for the full restoration of internet access to the country. Anthony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, said: "Democracies around the world are coming together to support the Cuban people, calling on the Cuban government to respect Cubans' demands for universal human rights." Meanwhile, the Cuban Embassy in Paris was attacked with gasoline bombs. This comes as several Cuban embassies in several countries have witnessed demonstrations both against and for Cuba's government in reaction to protests that erupted across the country.

The US: Wildfires continue to rage across the west

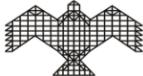
On 26 July, The Guardian reported that at least 85 active wildfires have torched roughly 1.5m acres across 13 US states, mostly in the west. Additionally, figures of the National Interagency Fire Centre (NIFC) reported that the 2021 fire season is already on track to break records set in 2020. According to the NIFC, more than 90 per cent of the west is now officially in drought, with heatwaves beginning to set numerous records in the Pacific north-west, northern Great Basin, and Northern Rockies.

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About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI)

The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI), initiated in 2018 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), is a part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies.

IPRI undertakes research on various issues relating to peace with special emphasis on radicalisation, sustainable peace, gender roles in peacebuilding and global protest movements. IPRI research are published as briefs, reports and commentary.



About Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education”, in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. KAS promotes and preserves free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. KAS also focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, KAS seeks to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation on the foundations of its objectives and values. Together with the partners, KAS makes a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible



About Conflict Weekly

The Conflict Weekly an academic endeavour to bring every Wednesday/Thursday a weekly analysis of the conflict and peace processes in the world; aiming to look at the larger peace picture. It is published by the NIAS-IPRI in collaboration with the KAS India Office.

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