Conflict Weekly

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A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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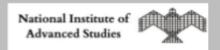
Protests in Senegal, Imran Khan's arrest attempt and Bank distress across the US and Europe

Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis, and Ankit Singh



(Senegal opposition supporters protesting against the government in capital Darker. Image Source: AFP)





Continuing protests in Senegal

Anu Maria Joseph

In the news

On 14 March, more than 10,000 supporters of Senegal's opposition leader Ousmane Sonko began a three-day protest in the capital Dakar. The protesters demonstrated, holding the Senegal flag and chanting, "Maky Sall is a dictator." They faced heavy security, including dozens of anti-riot vehicles arranged by the government to crack down on the protests. Several protesters were injured after the security agencies used tear gas following clashes between the police and the protesters.

The protests were organized to support Sonko, an aspiring candidate for the 2024 presidential elections. The protests were also aimed against what the protestors termed as the "dictatorial" policies under President Macky Sall.

One of the protesters, Dabuche Niane, said: "We are very tired of Macky Sall. We want him to leave, no matter the price. The Senegalese people are tired - tired of poverty, of unemployment. The economy is not working. All we have are problems." Abdou Bara Mbodji, another protester, said: "It's not whether or not we like Macky Sall, what bothers us is the fact that he wants to force a third term."

Issues at large

First, frequent protests and the government's heavy-handed response. Protests have erupted frequently across the country over the past two years against the government's assertive policies and crackdown on the opposition leaders. In 2021, violent protests broke out when opposition leader Sonko was arrested over sexual allegations. At least 14 people were killed during the protests after clashes between the government forces and the protesters turned violent. In June 2022, another wave of protests erupted during the legislative elections after opposition candidates were disqualified on technical grounds. The protesters chanted a similar slogan, "Macky Sall is a dictator", and criticized the wide-ranging powers vested in the presidency. The resulting crackdown on the protests also received reproval from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association. Amnesty International criticized the arbitrary arrests and cautioned that the "repeated bans on demonstration, together with the death of people during such protests, represent a real threat to the right to protest in Senegal."

Second, repeated crackdowns on the opposition. Senegal has a recurring pattern of political opposition stymied, always on technical grounds. Sall's opponents accuse him of attempting to weaken the opposition through false allegations and political trials before the elections. During the June 2022 elections, the poll list of the main opposition coalition, Yewwi Askan Wi, was disqualified on technical grounds. In 2019, two major opposition leaders were arrested on corruption charges. The main opposition leader Sonko, who has gained significant widespread support from the urban youth since 2020, is due in court for a trial on libel charges. He is also facing charges of rape, which his supporters' claim were made up to stop him from running again in the upcoming elections.

Third, Macky Sall's controversial third-term ambition. According to the old constitution, Sall was first elected in 2012 for a seven-year term. However, a constitutional revision in 2016 reduced the presidential term from seven to five years. He was re-elected in 2019, and his



supporters argue that he could run for another term under the new constitution. Macky Sall is speculated to be preparing to run for a third term in the 2024 presidential elections, which the opposition claims to be unconstitutional. Sall has neither confirmed nor denied these speculations.

Fourth, economic crisis and popular discontent. Beyond the political tensions, the protests are also over the impending economic crisis in the country. Trending Economics, an economic survey media, reported that the annual inflation rate in Senegal reached 10 per cent in January 2023. Since 2020, following the COVID-19 pandemic, the country has been struggling with an economic crisis worsened by unemployment and the global rise in food prices amid the war in Ukraine affecting Senegal respectively. The public blames the government's incompetence and aggressive policies for the country's persisting economic crisis, unemployment, and poverty.

In perspective

The demonstrations are the latest reaction to growing discontent over President Macky Sall's speculated decision to run for a third term presidency. The government's more aggressive suppression of the protests indicates a reduction of the civic space, moving further away from democracy towards authoritarianism, which is of significant concern. Meanwhile, the tensions are expected to grow as the country gets closer to the presidential elections in 2024. Not too long ago, Senegal was considered a model for democracy and freedom, while coups and authoritarian regimes were the norms in west Africa. Given the current unstable regional environment in west Africa, political uncertainty in Senegal could spill beyond its borders.

Imran Khan's arrest attempt and political turmoil in Pakistan Femy Francis

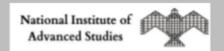
In the news

On 16 March, the Lahore High Court extended the ban on arresting Imran Khan to 17 March. The decision came after Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) supporters created a chaotic disruption when Islamabad and Punjab police tried to arrest him for his absence in court regarding the Toshakhana case. Additionally, the court banned PTI from holding a "power show", a "historical jalsa" at Minar-e-Pakistan scheduled for 19 March.

The same day, Lahore police lodged a fresh FIR against Imran Khan and his party leaders under the Anti-terrorism Act after Racecourse police reported violent clashes in Lahore and Islamabad. Additionally, the Punjab police accused PTI supporters of injuring 60 officers and vandalizing police vehicles with petrol bombs.

On 16 March, Imran Khan announced he was "ready to talk to anyone" except "thieves and looters" and sacrifice for the country's best interest. He specified that he is ready to talk about free and fair elections, not corruption. This comes after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif offered an "olive branch" of negotiations, inviting the PTI for an all-party political dialogue to address the crisis.

On 15 March, Gilgit-Baltistan's Inspector General of Police Muhammad Saeed was transferred by the federal government over the allegation of hindering the Punjab police's attempt to arrest Imran Khan. Refuting the allegations, the Punjab police claimed that no



confrontation had occurred: "The state is one unit, and all the institutions who don the uniform protect every inch of the state and will continue to do so." Gilgit-Baltistan's Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid also denied the accusations.

Issues at large

First, the nature of the protests. The ongoing clashes between PTI workers and the police point to their claim that the non-bailable arrest warrant is part of the ruling government's "political conspiracy." Imran Khan accused the government of plotting a "London Plan" to arrest and stop him from contesting in the elections. He said he wanted to present himself in court but was advised otherwise. In his earlier address, he committed to continue the struggle for "real freedom" regardless of what happened to him. The chaos was not limited to Zaman Park; protests throughout the country included Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Mandi Bhauddin, Sialkot, Narowal, and other districts in Lahore.

Second, the political tensions involving Imran Khan. Imran Khan's criticism for instigating violence and political blame games and hiding behind his party workers has increased criticism, which was further worsened through his social media addresses. The situation has pushed judicial action to its limits where Imran Khan's counsel is manoeuvring loopholes to avoid arrest. In doing so, Imran Khan has pitted himself against state institutions. Meanwhile, Bilawal Bhutto- Zardari remarked that if Imran Khan was innocent and refusing to appear in the court, then he was also refusing the right to defend himself.

Third, the judicial question. Imran Khan's counsel has repeatedly tried to challenge the non-bailable arrest warrant by claiming that he wished to present himself in court. However, there was no guaranteed security. The judge, on his part, has reiterated that the arrest warrant was to get Imran Kahn to the court, and it was warranted as he refused to follow the court order. Meanwhile, Imran Khan and his supporters have repeatedly declared that Imran Khan will present himself to the court only if the warrant is suspended.

In perspective

The political turmoil has pushed Pakistan into chaos and trivialized the judicial process, which is happening at a time when the country is facing an economic crisis and negotiating an IMF deal. The government also faces a political crisis amid long-delayed elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The police and the military are already stretched thin with increased terror activities. Apart from the clashes and tensions, the issues around arresting Imran Khan have made a mockery of the judicial system. While Imran Khan's concerns over his security are valid, these concerns should not be used as an excuse to evade trial. This begs the critical question: what is more potent, the political law backed by the sacrosanct constitution or the popular narrative only awarded to a few? The coming days are set to test the strength of Pakistan's state institutions as they attempt to bring Imran Khan to the court even as he extends the chaos for personal gains.

Bank distress across the US and Europe

Ankit Singh

In the news

On 10 March, Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) was closed down by the Federal Deposit Insurance



Corporation (FDIC) due to the reasons of uninsured assets beyond the limit and increased risk appetite. The previous week, SVB had tried to sell its debt securities at a loss while the bank witnessed a bank run of USD 40 billion dollars in the days that followed. The collapse of SVB became the second-largest bank failure in the financial history of the US. The SVB had assets valued at around USD 200 billion. Over a span of two weeks, Silvergate Bank and Signature Bank also collapsed and were transferred under the control of FDIC. The financial distress was echoed in Europe as well when Credit Suisse, a global investment bank from Switzerland, was denied further financial assistance by its largest shareholder, the Saudi National Bank. Credit Suisse borrowed USD 54 billion from the Swiss Central Bank, while there have been discussions of the merger of Credit Suisse with UBS. The European Central Bank has increased its policy rate by further 50 basis points bringing the policy rate to 3.5 per cent. Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden in order to control the financial distress has assured safeguarding the interests of small businesses and insured depositors and established a bridge bank to help insured depositors of failed banks to access their money.

Issues at large

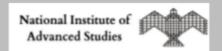
First, the impact of declining interest rates. The upward movement of the policy rate from zero to five per cent at the federal reserve has made short-term debt bonds more attractive than long-term bonds. The banking industry in the US has lost about USD 620 billion as long-term treasury bonds became prone to further degradation due to aggressive policy rate hikes. The SVB had, until recently, bet on long-term bonds; according to Reuters, SVB had placed 75 per cent of its debt securities in the long-term treasury bonds and the debt portfolio was not diversified enough to prove agile against stress tests as per the market editorials.

Second, the changing orientation of mutual funds and venture capital. De-globalization forces and disruptive supply chains have made mutual funds and venture capital the last option for investors, even as supply chains are undergoing transformation. There has been similar anxiety in the startup industry following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the global community has been unable to agree on robust measures which did not provide strong sentiments to the venture capital in climate-related innovation and technologies. Impacted by the recent inward pulling of labour and manufacturing to the US soil through legislation and sanctions, the portfolio of start-up industries which were linked to labour and capital across the globe has become more uncertain.

Third, unidirectional contagion tendencies of financial distress. The post-World War II financial architecture has been heavily skewed towards advanced economies which are concentrated in Europe and the American continent. The central bank and mega-corporations in advanced economies have driven the development destiny of the developing economies. Any distress emerging from advanced economies is likely to impact the macro plans of developing economies and their currency's purchasing power parity.

In perspective

First, conjectures vs facts. According to California's Department of Financial Protection and Innovation, the SVB was financially sound until the bank collapsed on 9 March. Some crypto advocates have called the action of FDIC an increased bank concentration and crowding out decentralization. The increased control will help liberals to go for more welfare policies like waiving off college debt while cementing the trend of stronger central banks across the globe, especially in libertarian advanced economies.



Second, geopolitical spillover. The race with China over superiority in commercial and military technology has been critical in geopolitical wrestling. The recessionary trends will pave the path for China and other developing economies to attain parity in welfare prosperity and sustaining development objectives.



Issues in Peace and Conflict This Week: Regional Roundups

Anu Maria Joseph, Akriti Sharma, Rashmi Ramesh, Harini Madhusudan, Ankit Singh, Femy Francis, and Padmashree Anandhan

East and Southeast Asia

China: Government considers increasing age of retirement to tackle ageing population crisis

On 14 March, the Ministry of Human Resources announced that China is considering a plan to gradually increase its retirement age to deal with the ageing population crisis. The plan would be progressive, flexible and would approach a differentiated path, increasing the age gradually. The Chinese working class that is nearing retirement may have to delay by a couple of months. Whereas, the period is expected to increase by a few years for the younger working populace. Currently, the age of retirement in China stands at 60 for men and 55 for women.

Taiwan: Defence budget expected to focus on fighting blockade by China

On 13 March, Reuters reviewed Taiwan's military report seeking approval on the budget and found that the country would be focusing on preparing weapons and equipment for fighting a blockade by China. The budget is expected to focus on F-16 fighters and replenishing its weaponry. According to the report, the Defence Ministry had begun reviewing their strategic fuel reserves and repair abilities in 2022. In an update on its threat assessment from China, the Defence Ministry of Taiwan stated: "Recently, the Communist military's exercise and training model has been adjusted from a single military type to joint operations of land, sea, air and rocket forces."

Philippines: Government announces joint military exercise with the US

On 13 March, the Philippines and the United States announced an army-to-army exercise. The development comes with respect to the joint military exercises aiming to strengthen Southeast Asian abilities to defend itself from territorial and external threats. This comes after the Philippine President, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, allowed the US to expand their access to the Philippines military base. It is estimated that more than 3000 soldiers will participate in the three-week military exercise. Under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with Manila, the US can use the base for joint training, pre-positioning of equipment, and building facilities including runways and military storage.

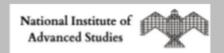
North Korea: Recent firearm launches could annihilate the enemy, says government

On 14 March, North Korea launched two short-range ballistic missiles near the country's east coast. As part of the demonstration drill, two surface tactile ballistic missiles were fired on the west coast. Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the North Korean state media quoted the government: "They will surely annihilate the enemy if they fight it, the commander of the unit resolved to thoroughly have the ability to fully carry out their duty of fire assault any time by further intensifying the training of every fire assault company." This comes after 11-day joint military drills between South Korea and the US called "Freedom Shield 23."

South Asia

India: Biggest arms importer from 2008-2022 according to SIPRI

On 13 March, according to the data released by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on global arms transfers, India remained the largest arms importer from



2018-2022 even though its overall imports declined by 11 per cent. Russia was the largest supplier for India followed by France and the US from 2018-2022. After India, the biggest importer of arms is Saudi Arabia.

Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa

Israel: Judicial bill passes the first vote in Knesset

On 14 March, the Knesset advanced the bill with the much controversial judicial reforms that will reduce the judiciary's power and independence to a great extent. The bill has been a priority of the Netanyahu-led coalition government. Protests opposing the bill continued for a straight 10th week. The media reported a gathering of 250,000 to 300,000 people, but the organizers said it was a gathering of 500,000 people, one of the largest in Israel's history. The bill has given rise to a domestic political crisis, with people protesting on streets and the government refusing a compromise.

Syria: Israel air strikes injure three soldiers

On 12 March, Israel carried out air strikes in western and central parts of Syria. Syrian state news agency SANA reported that Israel "fired missiles from the direction of north Lebanon with targets in the Tartus and Hama countryside." The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that the attack targeted pro-Iranian forces present in specific locations. There were no casualties; however, three Syrian soldiers were wounded in the attack.

Israel-Palestine: Raids in Jenin, four killed

On 16 March, Israeli forces in an undercover operation, raided Jenin in northern West Bank. Palestinian Health Ministry said that four people were killed during the raid. Jenin is one of the areas where the raids have intensified with an aim to cut down Palestinian resistance. On 18 March, forces opened fire at el-Bireh near Ramallah, killing a man whom they claimed was advancing towards the army with a knife in hand. The raid in Jenin and the latest incident of shooting has brought the number of Palestinians killed this year to 84.

Africa: 30 migrants feared dead after boat capsized near the Libyan coast

On 13 March, BBC reported that more than 30 people are feared dead after a boat carrying migrants capsized near the coast of Libya. Alarm Phone, a humanitarian group said that it had alerted the authorities in Libya, Italy, and Malta, however, the countries refused to take essential action. The Italian coastguard claimed that the boat was in Libya's coast and the zone was difficult to reach because of bad weather. The Libyan authorities justified that they had no available boats to send.

Sudan: Protesters march towards the republican palace demanding civilian transition

On 14 March, hundreds of people protested in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, marching towards the Republican Palace. The police fired tear gas to crack down the protest. The protesters carried banners with names of those who were killed during the protests which have been going on since the military takeover in 2021. The protests demanding a civilian transition have been led by doctors, journalists, lawyers, teachers and engineers. The latest protests came under the slogan of "the revolution is a union and a neighbourhood committee"

Malawi: More than 200 people killed in tropical storm Freddy

On 16 March, Malawi President Lazarus Chakwera declared a "national tragedy" after more than 200 people died in the tropical storm Freddy. Chakwera promised to intensify rescue



operations as he attended funerals of the victims. The government had set up 30 emergency camps for at least 20,000 people who were forced to leave their homes. Health Minister Khumbize Chiponda described the situation as "very Fragile." She stated: "We have a history of getting cyclones. Unfortunately for Freddy, it was totally different, totally unexpected."

Nigeria: At least 25 people killed in Islamist militant attack

On 10 March, BBC reported that at least 25 people were killed in an Islamist militant attack in the north-eastern Borno state. The attack is suspected to be carried out by Islamic State West Africa Province (Iswap) militants. The UN has condemned the attack; UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Matthias Schmale stated: "This deeply shocking attack is another horrific reminder of the real threats of violence and insecurity that Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and other people affected by more than 13 years of the non-international armed conflict in the region continue to face daily in their struggle to survive."

Democratic Republic of Congo: At least 62 people killed in series of rebel attacks

On 17 March, BBC reported that at least17 people were killed in a militant attack in eastern Democratic Republic Congo. The Allied Democratic Forces, an active rebel group in the region who are said to have links to the Islamic State,, is suspected behind the attack. The attack comes after at least 45 being killed previously by the same rebels on 15 March. Despite the presence of multiple regional and international forces, M23 and ADF rebels' campaigns continue to exacerbate in the country.

Europe and the Americas

The UK: GBP five billion to be invested into armed forces

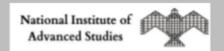
On 13 March, the UK announced the update to its foreign policy framework on investing an additional GBP five billion to its armed forces in the next two years. This means the total defence expenditure will now come to 2.5 per cent of its GDP. Of the allotted five billion, three is expected to be spent on nuclear and submarine capabilities and remaining to help Ukraine restock its weapons.

Germany: 200 Flights cancelled as German workers hold strike demanding higher pay

On 13 March, 200 flights were cancelled in Germany affecting 27,000 passengers as the workers went on strike over the demand for higher pay and against the unsociable working hours. This walkout was initiated by the Verdi trade union over pay for working nights, weekends and bank holidays. The union is demanding a 10.5 per cent raise and they have been offered a five per cent raise by their employers. The unions have refused to accept the offer stating that they are insufficient to make a difference in their expenses.

Germany: Federal Criminal Police reports a rise in crime rate against press

On 13 March, Deutsche Welle reported that Germany's Federal Criminal Police (BKA) stated they have recorded 320 criminal acts committed against journalists in the year 2022. The attacks can be categorized as the following: 320 were politically motivated, 46 were purely violent threats, 31 were related to property damage and 27 owed to incitement. The state of Saxony was the most affected with 69 crimes reported, 66 in Berlin and 40 in Bavaria. The Left party first came up with a report stating that the rise of attacks against police was owed to the Covid-19 protestS where there were 64 instances registered. The Left party spokesperson said: "Recorded crimes against media professionals reached a sad new high in 2022. This also applies to violent crimes, one-third of which — as in the previous year —



were committed in connection with COVID-related protests."

Europe: SIPRI forecasts increase in arms exports of the US and France

On 13 March, SIPRI reported that there has been a significant rise in arms export in the European regions with US exports reaching record highs. The arms imports to Europe from the US increased by 47 per cent and by 65 per cent by NATO. This rise is owed to the Russian invasion of Ukraine where the five major exporters are the US, Russia, France, China and Germany respectively. The US accounts for 40 per cent of the global arms trade with a recent hike of 14 per cent included. France's arms trade recorded a 44 per cent increase attaining the third position.

Venezuela: Countries and institutions pledge aid to resolve crisis

On 17 March, the European Union and Canada co-organized the "International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities" in Brussels. The European Commission stated that it had released over EUR 75 million for food, shelter and other necessities and also to host communities in neighbouring countries sheltering Venezuelan migrants. The US pledged USD 171 million and Canada pledged CAD 58.55 million in aid. According to the UN, over seven million people had fled Venezuela to other Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Haiti: PM hints at mobilizing military to tackle armed gangs

On 17 March, Prime Minister Ariel Henry said he plans to mobilize the military to assist the national police in tackling the gangs that are increasingly gaining ground. Henry said: "What we are living today is not a joke." The development comes after the UN special envoy to Haiti, on 15 March, said that armed gangs are freely moving around the country. The envoy had joined a meeting of the Organization of American States meeting and said: "It is urgent for the OAS...to understand that the worsening security situation on the ground has reached its peak, and armed gangs now roam the country unfettered."

El Salvador: State of emergency extended amid fight against gangs

On 15 March, the Congress extended a state of emergency for 30 days for the 12th time to fight against gangs. With the state of emergency which came into effect in 2022, over 66,000 suspects have been arrested; the emergency powers allows arrests without warrants, detentions without rights to a lawyer and grants the government access to private communication. Christian Guevara, head of the New Ideas party said: "We are determined to support not just one more (extension) but as many as are necessary at the government's request because that is what the people are asking for." According to the decree extending the emergency, the government's actions against gangs have "allowed the Salvadoran population to feel a sense of security."

Poland: Warsaw plans to station HIMARS near Russian border

On 17 March, Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak announced that the US-made HIMARS rocket launchers would be stationed on the border with Russia's westernmost Kaliningrad Region. He is said to have boasted that Washington had already approved Warsaw's order for 500 more HIMARS launchers, and noted how important they were to the Polish army. In December 2022, the Pentagon approved \$28 billion worth of arms deals, with Poland and the Baltic states being the biggest buyers. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg claimed in January that the UK had been modelling cyberstrikes specifically against the Kaliningrad government.



Russia: ICC issues an arrest warrant against Putin

On 18 March, The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin, alleging he is responsible for war crimes. The report has focused on the unlawful deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia, saying it had reasonable grounds to believe Putin committed the criminal acts directly, and accused him of failing to use his presidential powers to stop children being deported. Legally, the ICC has no powers to arrest suspects, and can only exercise jurisdiction within its member countries - and Russia is not one of them. However, this would affect Putin from being unable to travel internationally.

The US: MQ-9 reaper intercepted and downed by aggressive and unprofessional tactics of Russian fighter jet

On 14 March, one MQ-9 Reaper drone while conducting a reconnaissance mission over international waters in Black Sea was intercepted by two Russian Sukhoi 27 fighter jets. The drone was downed after the real propeller was damaged. Both the US and Russia got involved in a war of words while Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said: "remains to be seen" whether the downing was intentional." On 17 March, the US resumed its drone operations over Black Sea, while Russia awarded its pilots who intercepted the drone.

The US: Lawsuit filed against Willow oil and gas drilling project in Alaska.

On 14 March, a coalition of environmental and indigenous groups filed a lawsuit at the US district court in Alaska against the Biden administration over the approval of the Willow oil and gas drilling project in ConocoPhillips'. The USD eight billion project intends to open three new drilling areas in the remote wilderness of Alaska's western North Slope and is estimated to be capable of producing about 600 million barrels of oil over its three-decade lifespan. The groups claimed that the administration violated provisions of the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, procedural law and other federal statutes.

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National Institute of Advanced Studies

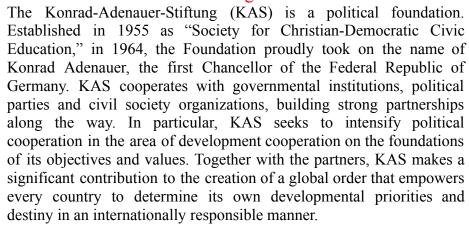


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The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI), initiated in 2018 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), is a part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies.

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 researches are published as briefs, reports and commentary.

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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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