

# Conflict Weekly

*A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world*

Conflict Weekly #192 | Vol. 04 | Issue No.36 | 7 September 2023



Commercial vessels part of the Black Sea Grain Initiative waiting for the permit to pass the Bosphorus Strait off the shores of Yenikapi in the city of Istanbul in Turkey. (Image Source: Mehmet Emin Calsikan, Reuters)

## The Fall of Black Sea Grain Initiative Leadership Troubles for Myanmar in ASEAN Post-Coup Tensions in Gabon



An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

Gender | Environment | Ethnic Violence

External Interventions | Armed Conflicts | Peace Processes



## Ukraine: The failure of the Black Sea Grain Initiative

Padmashree Anandhan

### In the news

On 4 September, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met Russian President Vladimir Putin. Following the meeting, an agreement was finalised to make Türkiye an exporter of Russian grains to Africa. According to the agreement, Russia will export free grains of up to one million metric tons to six countries in Africa with the help of Türkiye and Qatar. Putin stated: “We will be ready to consider the possibility of reviving the grain deal. And we will do it as soon as all the agreements on lifting restrictions on Russian agricultural exports are fully implemented.” Erdogan commented: “We believe that the initiative should be continued by eliminating its shortcomings... In this context, we have prepared a new proposal package in consultation with the UN. I believe that it is possible to get results.”

On 31 August, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced plans to send proposals to Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, intended to revive Ukraine’s grain export through the Black Sea.

### Issues at large

First, a profile on the Black Sea Grain Initiative. In July 2022, the deal was signed through mediation of the UN, Türkiye, Russia and Ukraine, allowing the setting up of a Joint Coordination Centre (JCC) in the city of Istanbul in Türkiye. It operated as a checkpoint for vessels to enter Ukrainian ports. The key aspect of the deal was to allow the export of Ukrainian grains and fertilisers through three Black Sea ports of Odessa, Chernomorsk, and Yuzhny. The deal has been extended twice with Ukraine exporting close to 32 million tons of wheat and corn. When the deal was subjected to a third renewal, citing the destinations of the grain export by Ukraine not being the Middle East or Africa, Russia withdrew.

Second, Russia’s assertion. Moscow’s objective was to lift the West’s sanctions over its grains and fertilisers. It also vouched for the supply of grains to developing countries mainly in Africa. Although the EU and the US introduced exemptions, Western companies refuse to trade with Russia. Besides, Russia demanded that its state agricultural bank should be reconnected to the global SWIFT payments system; its conditions not being met led to withdrawal. Despite such barriers, 60 million tons of grain were exported by Russia between July 2022 and June 2023. Russia continues to stage frequent drone strikes against Ukrainian port infrastructure in the Odessa port, and Ukraine’s alternate shipping route, the river Danube.

Third, Türkiye’s balancing act. Türkiye has played a role at the economic level, laying new routes for Russia to circumvent sanctions imposed by the West while increasing its exports with an 86 per cent increase to Russia. In turn, the exported oil and gas from Russia are exported to the EU member states, resulting in a slow shift from its heavy debt to a 5.6 per cent growth rate as of 2022. Additionally, being a mediator between Russia and Ukraine, facilitating the grain deal through its port facilities, added revenue to its maritime industry. Fourth, the failure of the UN to revive the grain initiative. The UN opted for a wider approach to address the food crisis proposing for the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to form a Black Sea Corridor. However, in terms of addressing the grain deal issue over the war in Ukraine, it lacked diplomatic efforts.

### In perspective

First, the impact on Ukraine. The deal provided Ukraine's exports a safe path through the maritime corridor and monitored the movement of the ships. Russia's withdrawal amid the divide in Europe against the accumulation of Ukrainian grains may seem untimely. However, Ukraine has subsequently prepared for this. According to the UK's Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), 65 per cent of Ukraine's grain is being exported through the ports of Izmail and Reni along the river Danube and Romania's port of Constanta. After which it is taken across the Black Sea. Apart from this, Ukraine has also re-routed the export through road and rail.

Second, uncertainty over prices and food supplies. In response to Russia's withdrawal from the deal, the prices of grains and oilseeds have increased. In the case of wheat and corn, the prices have decreased by 14 and 23 per cent respectively. Apart from the prices, the global food players in the market are also beginning to step in. Brazil, and the US, have reportedly increased exports of corn stocks close to 17 million tonnes.

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## Myanmar: The ASEAN leadership question

Genesy Balasingham

### In the news

On 5 September, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders during the 43rd ASEAN Summit held in the Indonesian capital Jakarta, announced that Myanmar would not assume rotating leadership of their regional group in 2026 due to ongoing conflict in the country. ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn announced that the Philippines will take over the ASEAN chairmanship for 2026.

The same day, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. expressed his gratitude to the ASEAN counterparts in Jakarta: "It is my pleasure to announce that the Philippines is ready to take the helm and chair ASEAN in 2026." President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, stated: "We must be captains of our own ships to bring about peace, to bring about stability, to bring about shared prosperity."

On 6 September, Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the ASEAN's statement that the opinions are not objective and their decisions are biased and one-sided.

### Issues at large

First, ASEAN's Myanmar problem. Myanmar's admission to ASEAN in 1997 was controversial as the country was run by a military dictatorship under the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Despite opposition from the West, ASEAN members agreed to include Myanmar in the bloc due to its geopolitical relevance. Myanmar's geographical location was crucial in expanding trade and transportation systems due to its proximity to the Bay of Bengal. In response to the 2021 coup, ASEAN leaders introduced a five-point agreement to end the crisis and called on the junta for negotiations. However, the Myanmar junta failed to implement the agreement, creating a schism within the organisation with certain countries including Thailand, strengthening their political engagement with Myanmar's military at the expense of ASEAN's unity.

Second, ASEAN's approach towards Myanmar after the coup. Following the coup, ASEAN countries prioritised their national security and wanted to avoid regional political turmoil considering that they share a similar political structure with a competition between military and democratic ideologies. The bloc's responses were divided. Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam have maintained closer ties with the junta and have been urging the bloc to recognize the coup. However, Malaysia and Indonesia pressed ASEAN to take strict action. ASEAN members struggle to formulate a unified and practical solution to Myanmar's crisis as the ASEAN principles of non-intervention and consensus-building limit their power to take any action.

Third, the response from Myanmar's military. ASEAN has barred junta leader Min Aung Hlaing from attending the summit since he did not comply with the five-point consensus; however, the bloc is willing to accept any non-political delegate. The junta insists on sending its leader or a high-ranking official. This is compounded by a conflict of interest in which neither of the two sides is ready to step away, resulting in a stalemate situation. Myanmar junta claims that ASEAN inviting a non-political representative is biased and it accuses ASEAN of denying its representation.

### In perspective

First, the exclusion of Myanmar in chairing the ASEAN summit. For ASEAN, Myanmar's leadership would have potentially exacerbated the schism among ASEAN members due to differing perspectives and responses to the coup. With such divergences of view, reaching a consensus is difficult, preventing ASEAN from offering clear and balanced leadership to enact meaningful action. This would imply that ASEAN has failed to preserve one of its primary goals of restoring security and peace in the region.

Second, ASEAN's denial of Myanmar's chairmanship has little effect as it has solid bilateral relations with the member countries and the crisis persists regardless of Myanmar's membership in ASEAN. ASEAN has little influence over the junta's decisions. Given the political upheaval and fatalities, inviting the junta would be the right option where a dialogue could be initiated.

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## Gabon: Post-coup tensions

Nithyashree RB

### In the news

On 5 September, Central African Republic's President Faustin Touadera met with Gabon's interim President General Nguema. According to Reuters, Touadera was there to mediate between the coup leaders and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

On 2 September, Gabon's borders were reopened. The coup leaders stated that they “preserve respect for the rule of law, good relations with our neighbours and all states of the world.”

On 1 September, General Oligui Nguema was sworn in as the interim President of Gabon. In his speech, General Nguema promised that free elections would be held without mentioning the transitional period. He added that a new government would be formed with new electoral legislation, a penal code and a constitutional referendum.

On 1 September, the African Union (AU) suspended Gabon's membership until the civilian government was restored. The same day, the opposition alliance, Alternance 2023, led by Albert Ondo Ossa pressured the coup leaders to restore civilian rule. The opposition claimed that they were the rightful winner of the presidential election and urged the coup leaders to recount the votes.

On 31 September, Ossa in an interview with Al Jazeera denounced the coup as a “palace revolution” and a “family affair.” He stated: “I think the Bongo family got rid of one of its members who was weighing on the family, and they wanted Bongo power to continue, while at the same time preventing Albert Ondo Ossa from coming to power.” On 31 August, General Nguema declared that “companies have overcharged and the services will revisit these investigations so that this overcharging reverts to the State” in a meeting with over 200 business leaders.

### Issues at large

First, a brief note on the coup. On 30 August, Gabon's senior military officials through national media, Gabon24, announced a coup citing improper elections. They stated: “Today the country is undergoing a severe institutional, political, economic, and social crisis; In the name of the Gabonese people, we have decided to defend the peace by putting an end to the current regime.” The coup announcement came hours after incumbent President Ali Bongo was declared the winner of presidential elections held on 26 August. On 31 August, the head of the republican guard, General Brice Oligui Nguema, was announced as Gabon's transitional leader.

Second, the rhetoric on the “Palace Revolution.” General Nguema is said to belong to the Bongo family. General Nguema, who was one of the republican guards of former President Omar Bongo, according to Africanews, was sent on a special mission to Morocco and Senegal to avoid a power struggle in 2009. The military announced the coup promising to end decades-long rule by the Bongo clan. However, according to the opposition alliance, Alternance 2023, the coup has merely replaced Bongo with another Bongo, an effort by the Bongo family to remain in power. There are rising concerns that General Nguema would be no different than the Bongos as he had close ties with the Bongo family.

Third, reluctance to recount the ballot. Following the coup, there was mounting pressure from the opposition, Alternance 2023, to restore civilian rule and recount the ballots. Alternance 2023 leader Ossa, in interviews with Al Jazeera and TV5 Monde, stated that he had won the elections and that the recounting of the ballot would prove the same. The coup leaders rejected the call to recount the votes. Despite General Nguema stating that free elections will be held following the transitional period, no specific date has been mentioned yet.

Fourth, the reaction from regional actors against the response from the coup leaders. The AU and the ECCAS have suspended Gabon's membership following the coup. However, the coup leaders seem resilient to any form of intervention. The coup leaders are indifferent towards the stance of the regional actors against the coup.

#### In perspective

First, continuity or change. The rhetoric of replacing Ali Bongo with another alleged member from the Bongo clan raises a potential concern about the continuity of Bongo rule.

Second, the uncertainty of free elections. Since 2020, eight countries have undergone a coup in Western and Central Africa. The coup leaders have promised free elections but holding elections seems like a far-fetched reality. In Mali, the coup leaders promised presidential elections in 2022 but it was postponed to 2024. In Gabon, the unwillingness to recount the ballot and the promise of free elections without specifying a date indicates that the coup leaders are not inclined to hold elections in the near future.



## Issues in Peace and Conflict This Week: Regional Roundups

Rishika Yadav, Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis, Padmashree Anandan, Dhriti Mukherjee and Akriti Sharma

### East and Southeast Asia

#### Japan: Chinese ban on Japanese seafood “unacceptable”

On 3 September, the Japanese government told the World Trade Organization (WTO) that the Chinese ban on Japanese seafood amid the treated water release from the Fukushima nuclear plant is “totally unacceptable.” Countering the Chinese notification to WTO on 31 August, calling for the suspension of Japanese aquatic imports, the Japanese government said that it would explain the safety of the released water at WTO committees and urged China to revoke its decision. The Japanese government has hinted at filing a complaint against China to the WTO, which the US has announced to support. In 2022 Japan exported USD 814 million worth of aquatic products to China; therefore, the current Chinese position will have a drastic effect on the Japanese seafood industry.

#### North Korea: Japan, the US and South Korea impose sanctions over satellite launch attempt

On 1 September, Kyodo News, a Japanese media, reported that in response to North Korea’s failed reconnaissance satellite launch on 21 August, Japan, the US, and South Korea have imposed additional sanctions on the country, including asset freezes on individuals and organisations. The Japanese government has imposed sanctions on a Chinese citizen, one UK citizen, two North Korean citizens and three groups including the North Korean hacking group, Andariel. The South Korean government has imposed sanctions on a North Korean firm linked with weapons development and five individuals involved in fundraising for Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile activities. The US rolled out sanctions on two North Korean individuals and a Russian company, Intellekt LLC, for allegedly financing North Korea in developing weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. These sanctions reflect international concern over North Korea’s satellite launches which violate UNSC resolutions that prohibit the country from using ballistic missile technology. It implies coordinated efforts among regional allies pressuring North Korea to abandon similar activities which could potentially destabilise the region.

#### North Korea: Resolution against China’s forced repatriation of defectors

On 3 September, The Korea Herald reported that the Inter-parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), a cross-party alliance of parliamentarians from democratic countries, met in the Czech Republic capital Prague. The alliance adopted a resolution aimed at urging respective governments to diplomatically press China to halt the forced repatriation of North Korean defectors. The alliance, despite South Korea not being a member, has been working with South Korean ruling People Power Party (PPP) representative, Ji Seong-ho, who defected from North Korea and has been advocating on this issue. He commented that the defectors are likely to face severe human rights violations if returned to North Korea. The summit focused on the potential mass deportation of defectors amid the opening of borders between China and North Korea.

#### Malaysia: Calls for “strong” measures against Myanmar

On 5 September, the Malaysian government called for “strong” measures against Myanmar's generals for not adhering to the agreement to end the conflict in Myanmar. Malaysian



Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zambry Abdul Kadir, stated: “Malaysia and other member countries gave their views that we cannot allow this to continue without strong and effective measures imposed on the junta.” The development follows the commencement of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit which began on 2 September in the Indonesian capital Jakarta. Besides, the comments imply the growing regional frustration against the Myanmar junta that has made little attempt to implement ASEAN’s proposed peace plan, increasing violence and clashes with armed civilian groups that oppose the coup in 2021.

### South Asia

#### **Pakistan: Protests over inflated electricity bills**

On 2 September, The News International reported on widespread market closures in the cities of Lahore, Karachi and Peshawar where abandoned bazaars posted placards decrying “the unreasonable increase in electricity bills and taxes.” Thousands have taken to the streets against the price hikes and inflated power bills. In August, the government raised the power charges by around PKR eight per unit. However, reacting to the protests Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar stated: “It is not a very serious issue, but political parties are in election mode and using it as a social cause.” The protests have spread across the provinces of Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa

#### **Syria: Clashes between SDF and Arab tribal fighters**

On 5 September, BBC reported on the clashes between a US-backed, Kurdish-led militia, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and Arab tribal fighters, reportedly resulting in the deaths of dozens of people in the provinces of Hassakeh and Aleppo. The clashes erupted following the arrest of the Deir al-Zour Military Council leader Ahmed al-Khubail, accused of multiple crimes, including drug trafficking, mismanaging security and corruption. The SDF claimed that the arrest was part of an operation targeting Islamic State sleeper cells and drug dealers. The US has called on all sides to cease fighting immediately. A US-led global coalition depended on SDF and its allies in its campaign against Islamic State militants in northern and eastern Syria between 2015 and 2019.

#### **Palestine: Israel’s ceaseless raid**

On 5 September, Al Jazeera quoted the Palestinian Ministry of Health report on Israeli forces’ firing on Nur Shams refugee camp in the city of Tulkarem, in the occupied West Bank, killing 21-year-old Ayed Samih Khaled Abu Harb. The attack damaged the critical infrastructure of the camp. Al Jazeera reports, at least 232 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military this year. Nur Shams refugee camp, one of two in the city of Tulkarem, was founded in 1952 to shelter Palestinian refugees from the Haifa area following the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by Zionist troops in 1948. The camp has become a frequent target of Israeli forces; recently, on 24 July, at least 13 Palestinians were injured in an attack.

#### **Sudan: 20 people killed in SAF air strike**

On 4 September, at least 20 people were killed in a Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) air strike in the Sudanese capital Khartoum. The attack happened in the Alakla al-Qubba neighbourhood of south-west Khartoum. SAF and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been fighting since April. According to the UN, more than thousands have been killed and nearly 2.3 million have been displaced; more than half a million have taken shelter in neighbouring countries of Chad and South Sudan. Currently, RSF controls large swathes of Khartoum and



its twin cities of Omdurman and Bahri. SAF has been carrying out frequent artillery and air attacks to dislodge RSF. Clashes have additionally spread to the western Darfur region which has been grappling with decades of ethnic violence.

#### **Eritrea: Hundreds injured in a clash between rival Eritrean groups in Israel**

On 2 September Al Jazeera reported that more than 100 people were injured in Israel's city of Tel Aviv during a clash between a rival group of protesters from Eritrea. The clashes erupted between the anti-government and pro-government factions of Eritrean asylum seekers residing in the city of Tel Aviv. Israeli police fired warning shots in the air to disperse the protesters; at least 39 suspects who assaulted the police were arrested. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated: "We want harsh measures against the rioters, including the immediate deportation of those who took part." Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki has been in power since 1991 and the country never had elections. Political parties are banned and freedom of expression and the press are restricted in the country. Nearly 20,000 Eritrean asylum seekers are residing in Israel.

#### **Burkina Faso: 53 soldiers killed in rebel attack**

On 5 September, Al Jazeera reported that at least 53 Burkinabe soldiers were killed during a clash with rebel fighters. The clashes occurred in the Koumbri village in the Tatenga province on 4 September. The Burkinabe army stated: "This act of extreme cowardice will not go unpunished. Every effort is being made to disable the remaining terrorist elements on the run." It is unclear which group carried out the attack. However, militants linked to Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda have been carrying out frequent attacks in the country since 2017. According to the Al Jazeera report, the insurgency has killed thousands and displaced more than two million people.

#### **Kenya: Africa's first climate summit**

On 4 September, the first three-day Africa Climate Summit began in Kenya's capital Nairobi. The summit aims to bring together African leaders to create a shared vision of green development and get ready for the COP28 meeting. Climate financing is one of the major agenda of the summit. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has pledged USD 4.5 billion in clean energy investment in the continent; the UK is planning to invest EUR 49 million in managing the impact of climate change and on climate action. Addressing the member countries, Kenyan President William Ruto stated: "Africa holds the key to accelerating decarbonisation of the global economy. We are not just a continent rich in resources. We are a powerhouse of untapped potential, eager to engage and fairly compete in the global markets." Meanwhile, a coalition of civil society groups urged Ruto to circumvent a Western-led agenda that focuses on carbon markets and other financial tools to redress the climate crisis.

#### **Europe and the Americas**

##### **Iceland: Resumption of commercial whaling sparks criticism**

On 31 August, Iceland's government announced the resumption of commercial fin whale hunting with stricter monitoring of hunting methods. Iceland's Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries stated: "A Regulation will be issued that will include detailed and stricter requirements for hunting equipment and hunting methods, as well as increased supervision." Meanwhile, Animal welfare advocacy groups including Humane Society International (HSI) have criticised the decision calling it "shameful." According to Iceland's Food and Veterinary Authority, 67 per cent of the 58 whales caught died or lost consciousness immediately when caught by the boats it monitored; however, 14 whales died after being shot more than once. In

Europe, Iceland along with Norway are the only countries still practising commercial whaling.

### **Spain: Three casualties reported in flash floods**

On 5 September, heavy rainfall caused flash flooding in the central province of Toledo in Spain, killing three people and several others missing. The raging winds and hail caused widespread infrastructure damage. Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sanchez, applauded emergency services for their efforts and encouraged citizens to remain cautious. The weather office, Agencia Estatal de Meteorología (AEMET), issued a red alert on 3 September and has switched to a yellow alert as the storm moves away from the country.

### **Cuba: Government to act against Cubans fighting for Russia in the war in Ukraine**

On 4 September, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that a human trafficking ring in Cuba has coerced its citizens to fight for Russia in the war in Ukraine. According to Al Jazeera which quoted an unnamed Russian media, the ring has been operating in both Cuba and Russia, with several Cuban citizens having signed contracts with Russian armed forces in May 2023, in return for Russian citizenship. The ministry expressed the country's "clear historical position against mercenaryism" and "active role in the United Nations in repudiation of this practice." Authorities are presently undertaking efforts to "neutralise and dismantle" the ring, further highlighting how similar cases in the past "have been neutralized and criminal proceedings have been initiated." The Russian government has not responded yet.

### **Peru: Six people killed in clashes over drug trafficking**

On 4 September, Al Jazeera reported that four soldiers and two alleged members of a rebel group, Shining Path, were killed in a clash in the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers (VRAEM) in the province of Huanta in Peru. The poverty-stricken region is an established cocaine-producing centre and is the only outpost for the Shining Path, a Maoist rebel group. The army stated that the soldiers died "during the confrontation" after managing "to kill two terrorist criminals." Similar clashes have become more prevalent as groups are vying to control the drug trade in Peru, which is the second-largest producer of coca leaf.

### **The US: California passes bill banning discrimination based on caste**

On 5 September, the state senate of California became the first in the US to pass a bill banning discrimination based on caste. Once signed by Governor Gavin Newsom the bill became a law. The caste system is a centuries-old system of hierarchy in the Hindu religion. On 6 September, the author of the bill, Democratic state senator, Aisha Wahab, commented: "I'm proud to stand in solidarity with every person who said they, as a Californian, experienced caste discrimination, and others who say they want it to stop." Meanwhile, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) opposed the passage of the bill, calling it divisive and called on the governor to veto the bill.

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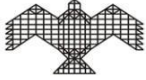
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### About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative(IPRI)

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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.

### 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. 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 manner.

KAS has organized its program priorities in India into five working areas: Foreign and Security Policy; Economic, Climate, and Energy Policy; Rule of Law; Political Dialogue focused on Social and Political Change; and Media and Youth. The India Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation takes great pride in its cooperation with Indian partner institutions that implement jointly curated projects and programmes.

### 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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