



THE NEW COLD WAR IS SENDING TREMORS THROUGH NORTHEAST ASIA



Dossier n° 76

Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research

May 2024

This dossier was produced in collaboration with the International Strategy Center (ISC) in Seoul, South Korea, and written by Dae-Han Song. Special thanks to the members of the ISC's content team (Alice Kim, Giovanni Vastida, Greg Chung, Mariam Ibrahim, Matthew Philipps, and Zoe Yungmi Blank) and to the team at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research for the support, input, and edits that made this dossier possible.

The Hiroshima Panels were created by Japanese husband and wife Maruki Iri (1901–1995) and Maruki Toshi (1912–2000) over a thirty-two-year period to depict the horrors caused by the nuclear bombs that the United States government dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. During this period, they painted around 900 human figures representing some of the people killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (though the exact death count is unknown, it is estimated to be as high as 220,000).¹ Rendered in the traditional Japanese ink wash painting style known as *sumi-e*, this series of fifteen folded panels carries a powerful message against war and for peace – a banner that this dossier continues to carry for the region and the world.

Credit: Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels. For captions, see page 38.

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Dossier n° 76 | Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research
Co-published with the International Strategy Center (South
Korea) and No Cold War
May 2024



On 18 August 2023, the heads of state of the United States, Japan, and South Korea gathered for a historic summit at Camp David. At the secluded US presidential retreat in Frederick County, Maryland, the three leaders announced a new agreement for ‘trilateral security cooperation’ in Northeast Asia, aimed principally at containing the rise of China.² Washington’s previous efforts to create such a pact were unable to overcome the frayed relations between Japan and South Korea that stem from the legacy of Japanese colonialism. But this time, to pave the way for this military bloc, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol excused Japan from paying reparations for its colonial and war crimes.

The US-led New Cold War against China is destabilising Northeast Asia along the region’s historic fault lines as part of a broader militarisation campaign that extends from Japan and South Korea, through the Taiwan Strait and the Philippines, all the way to Australia and the Pacific Islands. Backed by Washington, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has accelerated his country’s rearmament, aiming to double military spending by 2027 and acquiring long-range missiles to strike enemy targets.³ Meanwhile, Korea’s peace process has been derailed as the US expands its power projection in the region. Although North Korea has often been touted as the reason for increased militarisation, this has always been a fig leaf for US containment strategies – first against the Soviet Union and today against China.

In fact, the ‘old’ Cold War never ended in Northeast Asia, its embers still burning in the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and the integration of

China into the global economy, the US network of bilateral military alliances that was created after World War II has kept the region divided. At the same time, alongside these fault lines of conflict, countervailing movements are fighting for peace, ecological survival, and people's well-being across Northeast Asia, from the Okinawa Islands to the buzzing metropolis of Seoul. To build a future of peace and cooperation, it is necessary to stop the US-led New Cold War and dismantle the system of bilateral alliances that have impeded justice and reconciliation in the region for over 70 years.





Part I: The New Cold War

The US Pivot to Asia

Since the international financial crash of 2008, the global order has shifted from a system firmly centred on the United States-led Group of Seven (G7) countries to one that is less unipolar, although not yet well-defined. The Western powers are mired in a crisis of leadership and legitimacy generated by the inability of the US and its allies to deal with the ongoing economic crisis (or Third Great Depression), China's economic ascendance, and the arrival of major countries of the Global South into the world's political arena, particularly through BRICS.⁴

In this context, the focus of US foreign policy across successive administrations has increasingly turned eastward to contest the rise of China, which Washington views as the principal threat to its global pre-eminence. The Obama administration termed this the 'Pivot to Asia', a strategic shift that was to have both economic and military dimensions. On the one hand, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) aimed, in Obama's words, 'to make sure that the United States – and not countries like China – is the one writing this century's rules of the world's economy'.⁵ On the other, the expansion of the US Pacific Command (later renamed the 'Indo-Pacific Command' in 2018) would place 60% of US warships in the Asia-Pacific by 2020.⁶ It is important to note that the US began this hostile foreign policy turn despite the Chinese government indicating that it did

not seek global primacy. At its 18th National Congress in 2012, for instance, the Communist Party of China (CPC) laid out a foreign policy that sought to create ‘a new type of great power relations’ in which China’s ‘peaceful rise’ would not confront the United States frontally.⁷

Both Donald Trump and Joe Biden, with their own characteristics, have continued Obama’s Pivot to Asia, with one important difference. By the time Trump took office, it was clear that the US Congress was not going to endorse the TPP, which soon collapsed (nonetheless, the Asian countries – with China as the largest economy among them – moved ahead with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, signed in 2020). Trump’s trade war against China substituted for Obama’s multilateral economic intervention in the region as Washington adopted a more belligerent posture towards Beijing.⁸ In its *National Security Strategy* (2017), the Trump administration outlined a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ framework that explicitly portrayed China as a threat, alleging that the country seeks to ‘challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity’, and, ultimately, ‘shape a world antithetical to US values and interests’.⁹

The Biden administration has deepened Trump’s policy of economic protectionism (often referred to as ‘decoupling’) and militarism. Through wide-ranging export controls, the Biden administration has sought to restrict China’s access to cutting-edge semiconductors (a linchpin of the Fourth Industrial Revolution) and related technologies while pressuring leaders in the semiconductor industry such as South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and the Netherlands to enact

similar restrictions.¹⁰ Meanwhile, with the CHIPS and Science Act (2022) Biden has sought to promote the ‘reshoring’ of semiconductor manufacturing to the US.¹¹ As former Pentagon official Jon Bateman said, referring to the Biden administration’s policies, ‘The strategic objective and political commitment are now clearer than ever. China’s technological rise will be slowed at any price. ... [The US will] openly block China’s path to become an advanced economic peer.’¹²

More alarmingly, Biden has intensified his predecessor’s militarist Indo-Pacific strategy. The Biden administration has further developed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (‘Quad’), a strategic grouping including Australia, India, Japan, and the US revived under Trump, and created new blocs such as the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) nuclear-powered submarine pact and the Japan-South Korea-United States (JAKUS) security partnership. These actions are escalating tensions and fuelling an arms race in Asia, especially in Northeast Asia, which contains the largest overseas US military presence in the world.¹³



Building an Asian NATO?

In the Asia-Pacific, the US-led ‘rules-based order’ is maintained through its immense overseas military presence, which extends from Hawaii and Guam up to China’s coast. In Northeast Asia, this force is stationed mainly in Japan and South Korea, which together contain more than 80,000 troops and 193 US military bases and account for nearly a quarter of all US foreign bases.¹⁴ Building upon this armed presence, the US trilateral military partnership with Japan and South Korea is approaching a level of commitment akin to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). At the conclusion of the 2023 Camp David Summit, the US, Japan, and South Korea issued a joint statement outlining their ‘trilateral security cooperation’. In it, they pledged their ‘commitment to consult with each other’ and ‘to coordinate [their] responses to regional challenges, provocations, and threats’, naming China and North Korea among their ‘shared concerns’. On top of this, the US ‘unequivocally reaffirm[ed]’ that its ‘deterrence commitments’ to both Japan and South Korea were ‘ironclad and backed by the full range of US capabilities’.¹⁵ As a whole, these pledges are dangerously close to the ‘collective defence’ principle that underpins the NATO military alliance.

The United States has been eager to downplay such comparisons, with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan emphatically stating that the JAKUS agreement was ‘explicitly not a NATO for the Pacific’ and insisting that it was ‘not new’ in terms of US foreign policy. At the same time, however, Sullivan celebrated the partnership as a ‘significant breakthrough’.¹⁶ Even though the JAKUS commitments to ‘consult’ and ‘coordinate responses’ may fall short of

NATO's principle of 'collective defence', US officials have nonetheless lauded the agreement as elevating 'security and broader coordination to the next level in a really fundamental way'.¹⁷ With all three countries pledging to protect a common set of values, identifying China as a threat, and committing to missile defence and annual trilateral exercises, the JAKUS security cooperation possesses important elements of a military alliance that could drag South Korea and Japan into a US-China conflict, particularly around Taiwan.

From a military perspective, the JAKUS pact will increase US access to the 'first island chain' off the coast of China, which stretches from Japan, through Taiwan and the Philippines, to Malaysia. During the Cold War, US officials conceptualised this 'chain' of islands as the front line in its containment strategy against the Soviet Union and China. Military exercises that previously took place on an ad hoc basis have now been institutionalised as annual, multi-domain trilateral exercises, advancing the interoperability of the three countries' militaries.¹⁸ More broadly, the United States aims to use this trilateral alliance to preserve and strengthen its force projection into the region by targeting China's A2/AD (anti-access/anti-denial) missile system – which impedes the access and manoeuvrability of US naval ships in the region – through an Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) strategy.¹⁹ China's A2/AD strategy involves the deployment of long-range missiles to deter US aircraft carriers from conducting operations near Chinese shores. To counter this, the IAMD plans to link military assets – from Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missiles in Korea to Japanese Aegis warships – into a unified network with 'offensive-defensive integration'

to shield attack operations.²⁰ In addition, all three countries' radars would be integrated into a common US platform in Hawaii.²¹

The creation of this unified network has been at the heart of the US push for South Korea and Japan to establish greater security cooperation, including by sharing military intelligence through the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), signed in 2016. While GSOMIA was advertised as a measure aimed at countering North Korean missile activities, its comprehensive intelligence sharing means that the parties are also legally obligated to share information related to China and Russia.²² Building upon the US's existing bilateral agreements with South Korea and Japan, GSOMIA has paved the way for trilateral intelligence sharing, including real-time missile-warning data.²³



The North Korean Bogeyman

Two of the main justifications for increased US and allied military capabilities in Northeast Asia are the 'threat' posed by North Korea and the need to 'defend' Taiwan. However, it is important to note

that peace with North Korea has always been secondary to broader US containment strategies aimed at the Soviet Union and China. The US has yet to seriously pursue peace in a sustained manner with North Korea since the Korean War armistice agreement was signed in 1953. Over the decades, any breakthroughs in negotiations have been sabotaged, interrupted, and/or neglected by changes in administration. For instance, during the Clinton administration, the US and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework (1994), which nearly offered a path towards peace and denuclearisation until it was stalled by a Republican-dominated US Congress and then derailed by the neoconservatives John Bolton and Robert Joseph during the Bush Jr. administration.²⁴ This dynamic was repeated again in 2019, when talks between the US and North Korea collapsed after the Trump administration abruptly changed the terms of a potential agreement during a summit in Hanoi, Vietnam (with Bolton once again playing a key role).²⁵

Maintaining a state of controlled tension and conflict in the Korean Peninsula serves as a useful pretext for US military activity in the region. For example, the installation of the US-owned THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea in 2017 was justified as a defensive measure against North Korean missiles, even though the chosen location prevents it from defending half of the country's population, including the Seoul metropolitan area.²⁶ However, THAAD's location does allow it to peer deep into China's missile system.²⁷ Through the New Cold War, the US continues to derail the pursuit of peace on the Korean Peninsula and promote sharper geopolitical divisions, with the south moving towards the United States and the north towards Russia and China.



The Taiwan Hot Spot

Similarly, peace has never been the US's primary objective in the Taiwan Strait. Although Beijing, Taipei, and Washington each officially recognise that the island and mainland are part of 'One China', US intervention has kept the two divided since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. The most recent tensions surrounding Taiwan began in 2016 with the election of Tsai Ing-wen of the pro-US, separatist-inclined Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which takes the position that Taiwan is a 'sovereign state' and 'is not a part of the People's Republic of China'.²⁸ The situation has escalated under Trump and Biden alike, punctuated by a series of unprecedented, controversial visits to the island by US officials and lawmakers from both major parties. In 2020, Trump's Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar became the highest-ranking US cabinet official to visit Taiwan since 1979. Two years later, during the Biden administration, then Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visited the island, becoming the first sitting house speaker to do so since 1997. These meetings have provoked China to respond with large-scale military exercises, in line with its 2005 Anti-Secession Law which states that it will 'employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity' should 'possibilities for a peaceful reunification... be completely exhausted'.²⁹ At the 20th National Congress of the CPC in 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping strongly re-emphasised this stance:

Taiwan is China's Taiwan. Resolving the Taiwan question is a matter for the Chinese, a matter that must be resolved by

the Chinese. We will continue to strive for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and the utmost effort, but we will never promise to renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary. This is directed solely at interference by outside forces and the few separatists seeking 'Taiwan independence' and their separatist activities; it is by no means targeted at our Taiwan compatriots.³⁰

Washington's increased focus on Taiwan reflects the relative decline of the US-backed military strength on the island vis-à-vis the mainland. As noted in a 2022 report by the US Congressional Research Service, 'For decades, Taiwan's military was more advanced than China's... As China's air, naval, missile, and amphibious forces have become more capable, the balance of power across the Taiwan Strait has shifted significantly in the PRC's favour'.³¹ Presented with a much more capable China, the United States has pressured Taiwan to adopt a 'porcupine strategy', ramping up arms sales to the island to give it the capacity to inflict sufficient damage against the Chinese mainland in order to prevent Beijing from being able to attain reunification by forceful means.³² The strategy ultimately depends on a willingness to inflict heavy casualties and damage against the Chinese mainland and accept even greater levels of destruction for Taiwan.



The Threat of Military Escalation

If fears regarding potential military escalation in the New Cold War are allayed by the notion that missile defence technologies can shield the United States and its allies, a counterargument would be the porousness of missile defence systems. No matter how many resources are poured into creating radars to detect missiles and interceptors to neutralise them, the relatively cheaper cost and easier production of missiles allows the offensive country to ‘simply build more missiles to overwhelm the defence’.³³ This is because defence systems require greater precision than offensive missiles, as they are tasked with shooting down a moving target in the sky. In effect, the defence must shoot down a bullet with a bullet. In fact, the Ground-Based Midcourse Defence (GMD) system, which shields the United States from missile attacks, has only been effective 55% of the time in highly scripted exercises. To reach a confidence level of 90%, the GMD system would have to fire three interceptors per incoming warhead. Across the entire US missile defence network, including shorter-range systems, the success rate in testing is still limited to approximately 80%.³⁴ Missile defence technologies are simply incapable of completely shielding the United States, let alone Taiwan, South Korea, or Japan. As such, the only truly viable ‘deterrent’ is the threat of massive immediate retaliation, which risks triggering conflicts that spiral out of control and result in mutual destruction.



Part II: The ‘Old’ Cold War Never Ended

The current tensions in Northeast Asia are simmering along historic fault lines riven into the region during the ‘old’ Cold War. On one side of the line were the United States, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, and on the other were the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea. To make sense of the New Cold War, it is important to understand how this history has shaped Japan, the Korean Peninsula, and Taiwan.



The Rearmament of Japan

In 1947, following its defeat in World War II, Japan enacted a new ‘peace constitution’ in which it pledged to ‘forever renounce war... and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes’.³⁵ However, facing the impending Chinese Revolution and fearing the spread of communism, the United States set out

to prop up Japan as an anti-communist bulwark in the region. As US State Department historians recount, ‘the idea of a rearmed and militant Japan no longer alarmed US officials; instead, the real threat appeared to be the creep of communism, particularly in Asia’.³⁶ Beginning with the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty between the Allied Powers and Japan, the US constructed a network of bilateral alliances in the region known as the San Francisco System that divided Northeast Asia along the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula.³⁷ For more than seven decades, the San Francisco System has maintained regional divisions and kept aflame the embers of conflict in the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula.

The chief concern of the United States was not to build a lasting peace in post-war Asia, but to increase its military strength for its war on communism. John Foster Dulles, the chief US negotiator for the San Francisco Peace Treaty, described Washington’s stance in the following manner: ‘Do we get the right to station as many troops in Japan as we want where we want and for as long as we want? That is the principal question’.³⁸ To achieve its aims, the United States obstructed the process of justice following the war, ignoring Japan’s responsibility for its colonial and war crimes (including massacres, biological warfare, sexual slavery, human experimentation, and forced labour).³⁹ The treaty excused Japan from paying reparations to its greatest victims. However, absent from the 51 participants in the San Francisco Treaty negotiations were mainland China, Taiwan, and North and South Korea – all of which were subjected to Japanese occupation. In addition, numerous war criminals and high-ranking officials of the Imperial Japanese state (1868–1945) were pardoned after World War II and restored to power by the US,

which was singularly focused on strengthening its position in the Cold War.

Among them was Nobusuke Kishi, former governor of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo in northeast China who was known as the ‘Monster of the Shōwa Era’.* Arrested after the war as a suspected Class A war criminal, Kishi was freed and, with the backing of the US, became prime minister of Japan from 1957 to 1960.⁴⁰ Kishi’s right-wing, nationalist Liberal Democratic Party received millions of dollars in support from the US Central Intelligence Agency during the Cold War and has ruled the country almost without interruption since 1955 (except for 1993–1994 and 2009–2012).⁴¹ As the historian Andrew Levidis notes, ‘A straight line runs between Kishi and the present, linking Japan’s [current] conservative elite to the wartime and imperialist era’.⁴²

By keeping the right wing in power, the United States prevented Japan from having to reckon with its imperialist past and white-washed its history in order to foster Japan’s remilitarisation and strengthen the US strategic position in Asia. Since the end of World War II, the US has maintained a massive military presence in Japan, including its occupation of Okinawa from 1945 to 1972 (at which point Okinawa was returned to Japan, although the US military has maintained its presence on the island). During this time, Japan – pushed by the US – has steadily rearmed and expanded the scope of its military. Perhaps most notably:

* The Shōwa era refers to the reign of Emperor Shōwa (1926–1989), the beginning of which marked the rise of militarism in Japan.

- In 1954, a new army was created called the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF), despite resistance from the country's war-weary population.
- In 1960, the JSDF committed to respond to attacks against the US military on Japanese territory.
- In 1992, the Japanese military began to participate in international peacekeeping missions.
- In 1997, the US and Japan adopted new guidelines allowing the JSDF to operate in 'surrounding areas'.
- In the 2000s, Japan participated in overseas military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in support of the US.⁴³

Today, Japan has more US military bases (120) and personnel (roughly 54,000) than any country in the world.⁴⁴

Japan's remilitarisation has accelerated significantly amid the US pivot to Asia. In 2014, then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (grandson of Nobusuke Kishi) advanced the notion of 'proactive pacifism' to re-interpret Japan's post-war constitution.* The reinterpretation permitted the use of force by Japan in situations of 'collective

* The 2014 reinterpretation of the post-war constitution circumvented the established process of constitutional amendment and was instead made by way of a cabinet decision. Abe's cabinet was dominated by members of the Nippon Kaigi, a far-right Japanese non-governmental organisation of which Abe himself is also a member. See Akira Kawasaki and Céline Nahory, 'Japan's Decision on Collective Self-Defence in Context', *The Diplomat*, 3 October 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/japans-decision-on-collective-self-defense-in-context/>.

self-defence’, including when ‘an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan’s survival’.⁴⁵ In December 2022, under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Japan issued a new *National Security Strategy* that named China as ‘the greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan and the peace and stability of the international community’.⁴⁶ At the same time, Kishida overturned a cap that, since 1976, had limited military spending to 1% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and announced that Japan would double spending to 2% of GDP by 2027 – equal to the spending target of NATO members and one that would make Japan the third-largest military spender in the world.⁴⁷ In 2022, Japan’s per capita military spending was already nearly double that of China, a gap that will continue to grow with Japan’s increase in military spending.⁴⁸



The Division of Korea

On 15 August 1945, immediately after Korea won its independence from Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), the United States divided the peninsula along the 38th parallel, which would become the

Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south and then the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north. This division, which endures to this day, had no historical or material basis other than US intervention: two US colonels drew an arbitrary line on a *National Geographic* map and, in an instant, split one people into two.⁴⁹ Five years later, the Korean War broke out. Despite claiming to uphold liberal democratic values, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) in the south refused, as the historian Bruce Cumings put it, to 'turn Korea over to the Koreans'.⁵⁰ Instead of recognising the grassroots democratic people's assemblies across the Korean Peninsula, the USAMGIK oppressed and persecuted them as communists. In an effort to inculcate market relations amongst the southern population – 'the vast majority of which consisted of poor peasants, and a tiny minority of which held most of the wealth', as Cumings wrote – the US propped up the tiny, reviled elite that had collaborated with the Japanese occupation.⁵¹

This was the backdrop for the division of the Korean Peninsula and the outbreak of the Korean War. Despite the proxy nature of the war, its horrors, deaths, and destruction created the material basis for an anti-communist ideology in the south that propped up dictators and repressed dissent for decades under the National Security Law.⁵² Although periods of rapprochement with North Korea have diminished the polarising effectiveness of red-baiting, anti-communism continues to prevent true and open debate within South Korea. In addition, the legacy of collaboration during the colonial occupation remains unaddressed and continues to shape the south. For the 70th anniversary of Korea's liberation, the media outlet *Newstapa* released *Collaboration and Forgetting* (2015), a documentary that revealed

that, in the south, many descendants of Korean independence fighters live in poverty because their families have been stigmatised as communists, while the descendants of Japanese collaborators live off their sizeable land inheritances.*

The JAKUS trilateral security pact is the latest chapter in this history. In the past, Japan's colonial legacy in Korea prevented such a partnership between Japan and South Korea from being realised. To get around this impediment, South Korea's conservative Yoon Suk Yeol administration waived Japan's responsibility for its crimes. For example, Yoon ignored a 2018 South Korean Supreme Court ruling that held Japanese companies such as Mitsubishi responsible for the forced labour of Koreans.⁵³ In addition, in contrast to the more balanced approach towards the United States and China taken by its predecessor (the Moon Jae-in administration), the Yoon administration has adopted a much clearer pro-US stance.** The People's Power Party, to which Yoon belongs, is the latest political incarnation of South Korea's conservative movement, the roots of which

* Of the 430 square kilometres of South Korean land that was owned by collaborationists during the Japanese occupation – equivalent to roughly two-thirds the size of Seoul – only 3% has returned to state ownership since liberation. See Kim Ri-taek, 'The Ever Persistent Cancer of Japanese Collaborators in Modern S Korean History', *The Hankyoreh*, 26 February 2019, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/english_editorials/883678.

** The Moon administration committed to the 'three no's': no additional THAAD deployment, no participation in the US missile defence network, and no establishment of a trilateral military alliance with the US and Japan. The Yoon Administration, on the other hand, embraced the US's 'free and open Indo-Pacific'. Furthermore, Yoon was the first president to participate in a NATO summit. See Park Byong-su, 'South Korea's "Three No's"'. Announcement Key to Restoring Relations with China', *The Hankyoreh*, 2 November 2017, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/817213.

can be traced to collaboration with Japanese colonialism and the US occupation.*



Taiwan, An 'Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier'

The Chinese Civil War was fought intermittently from 1927 to 1949 between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT). Intent on preventing a communist victory, the US strongly backed the KMT, such as by providing more than \$2 billion in aid between 1945 and 1949.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the CPC would prevail, establishing the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland while the KMT fled to Taiwan, where it established a

* The roots of the People's Power Party and broader conservative movement in South Korea can be traced back to the Park Chung-hee military dictatorship (1961–1979) and are steeped in an anti-communist ideology. Prior to Korea's liberation from Japan, Park served in the Imperial Japanese Army, helping to hunt independence fighters. Later, Japan would provide both the inspiration and the funds for Park's modernisation projects. Park's daughter, Park Geun-hye, served as South Korea's president from 2013 to 2017, when she was impeached and convicted on corruption charges. In the aftermath of this scandal, the People's Power Party was formed through the merger of multiple conservative parties, including the successor to Park Geun-Hye's Saenuri Party.

rival government-in-exile, the Republic of China (ROC). Situated roughly 150 kilometres off the coast of the mainland, Washington utilised Taiwan as a platform to apply pressure to Beijing and isolate it from the international community (for instance, from 1949–1971, the US and KMT successfully manoeuvred to exclude the PRC from the United Nations by arguing that the ROC administration in Taiwan was the sole legitimate government of the entirety of China). In fact, US officials openly referred to the island as an ‘unsinkable aircraft carrier’.⁵⁵

During the Cold War, the US-backed ROC established a repressive dictatorship in Taiwan, including a consecutive 38-year period of martial law from 1949–1987 known as the ‘White Terror’, which was marked by severe political repression, the imprisonment and torture of 140,000–200,000 people, and execution of 3,000–4,000 others.⁵⁶ Although Washington ended its official relations with Taiwan in the 1970s when it normalised relations with China, it has maintained ‘unofficial’ relations with the island, including extensive military, political, and economic ties. As part of its New Cold War, the US is ramping up its armament of Taiwan in partnership with separatist forces.⁵⁷ With China having made it clear that it considers Taiwan to be a ‘red line issue that must not be crossed’, continued US intervention threatens to ignite a major conflict in the region.⁵⁸



Part III: A Path to Peace in Northeast Asia

To prevent conflict from breaking out in Northeast Asia, it is necessary to undo the US-led system of military alliances and the broader trend of militarisation that are escalating tensions in the region. However, to build a lasting peace, social movements and governments must also go beyond this and dismantle the underlying historic divisions sown by colonialism, the Cold War, and ongoing foreign intervention. Both Koreas must be allowed to choose their own path of peace and reconciliation. The Chinese mainland and Taiwan must be allowed to determine their future free from external interference. Japan must take responsibility for and come to terms with its imperialist past. And, above all, the US military must leave.

On 28–29 October 2023, the International Strategy Center (ISC) held an international forum titled ‘Building Peace: Preventing War in Northeast Asia’ featuring organisations and individuals involved in frontline struggles against US militarism.⁵⁹ The experiences of local grassroots movements in the region, drawn from this forum and elsewhere, help illustrate both the obstacles and potential pathways to peace.



Anti-Militarisation Struggles in Okinawa

The Okinawa Islands make up less than 1% of Japan's land mass but are home to 74% of the country's US military bases.⁶⁰ In a 2019 non-binding referendum, 72% of Okinawans voted against a proposal to build a new US military base in the Henoko-Oura Bay that would replace the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station.⁶¹ This opposition is rooted in the violent history of the US occupation – including the 1995 gang rape of a twelve-year old girl by US soldiers – and Japan's history of betraying the island. For instance, Okinawan civilians were used as a shield for mainland Japan against the approaching US military in some of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific during World War II.⁶² Okinawa was then sacrificed to US military rule so that Japan could recover its national sovereignty as part of the San Francisco Peace Treaty.

In addition to seeking peace, social movements in Okinawa are fighting against the presence of US military bases for reasons related to the environment, public health, and gender-based violence. For example, the Okinawa Environmental Justice Project is contesting the relocation of the Futenma base to the Henoko-Oura Bay coastal area given the toxic pollution produced by US military bases.⁶³ Meanwhile, the struggle against the US Kadena Air Base is connected to the sexual violence perpetrated by US soldiers as well as accidents related to US aircraft flying over urban areas. Often, movements that initially emerge in response to other issues evolve into broader struggles for peace and justice.

The expansion of Japanese military spending will require the government to either increase taxes or cut social welfare, each of which risks eroding public support. To drum up support, the Japanese government has pushed for the stationing of JSDF forces in some of Okinawa's southern islands, whose populations do not share the same experiences of war or occupation, and relied on a barrage of propaganda about threats related to China, Taiwan, and North Korea. According to Hideki Yoshikawa, director of the Okinawa Environmental Justice Project Peace, grassroots organisations are responding by working to 'create a larger, more cohesive peace movement', holding events and rallies to bring together peace groups from mainland Japan and abroad. The growing JAKUS trilateral alliance has, Yoshikawa notes, 'sparked a counter-alliance among peace movements' in each of the three countries.⁶⁴



A Peace Treaty in the Korean Peninsula

From June 2020 to July 2023, which marked the 70th anniversaries of the outbreak of the Korean War and armistice agreement, respectively, movements and peoples from South Korea and around the

world collected hundreds of thousands of signatures for a petition calling for a peace treaty to finally end the Korean War. This struggle for peace and reunification traces its lineage to the civil society efforts that culminated in the first inter-Korean summit, held from 13–15 June 2000 in Pyongyang, and the joint declaration issued by South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung and North Korean President Kim Jong-il. The meeting, which took place in North Korea under strict secrecy (to prevent US intervention), declared that peace and reunification would be achieved through the ‘joint efforts of the Korean people, who are the masters of the country’.⁶⁵ The US, however, had other ideas. After the 11 September attacks on the World Trade Centre, US President George W. Bush grouped North Korea, along with Iran and Iraq, as part of the ‘axis of evil’, derailing the incipient peace process that had blossomed into a source of great hope for South Korea and had been supported by Bush’s predecessor, Bill Clinton. This was yet another instance where peace in the Korean Peninsula was held hostage to US geopolitical interests.

In addition to these civil and diplomatic efforts to end the Korean War, the people of South Korea have continued to struggle against the US military presence on the peninsula. Since 2007, Gangjeong villagers have opposed the construction of a naval base that would station US warships in Jeju Island. As with the struggle in Okinawa’s Henoko-Oura Bay, this movement initially emerged due to concerns about the environmental destruction that the construction of the base would cause but soon turned into a larger struggle against militarisation. While the anti-base movement in Jeju has diminished in size over time, it nonetheless continues, revealing how militarisation can transform affected communities into bastions for peace.



Peace Across the Taiwan Strait

Compared with South Korea and Japan, the peace movement in Taiwan are less developed. According to Daiwie Fu, professor at the National Yang-Ming Chao-Tong University in Taipei and a participant in ISC's international forum, Taiwan's population is roughly split on the island's international position, with 50% wanting greater alignment with the United States (of which 10% favour independence and 40% favour a pro-US status quo) and the remaining 50% preferring greater rebalancing towards China (of which 10% favour reunification and 40% favour a more neutral status quo). However, Fu noted that there is a contradiction between Taiwan's militarisation and the need for greater social spending, criticising the 'porcupine strategy' pushed by the US and embraced by Taipei for presupposing an eventual war of attrition that would kill many civilians across the Taiwan Strait.

Although the incumbent, separatist-inclined Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won the January 2024 general election, recent polling data indicates that the views of Taiwan's population may be shifting. Whereas the 2016 and 2020 elections led to DPP majorities, the DPP's voting share dropped to 40% in the 2024 elections, down seventeen points from 2020. Meanwhile, the more Beijing-friendly opposition parties – the KMT and Taiwan People's Party – together won 60% of the vote in 2024. In addition, in the run up to the election, the American Portrait survey found that only 34% of Taiwan's population felt that the US was a trustworthy country, an eleven-point drop from 2021, with some commentators pointing to war in Ukraine as having damaged the US's credibility.⁶⁶



A Proposal for the Peace Movement

The United States is waging a New Cold War against China to maintain its global primacy and the ‘rules-based order’ that it has constructed. While these ‘rules’ are often equated with the principles of the United Nations Charter, the two are not the same.⁶⁷ Whereas the UN Charter reflects the consensus of its 193 member states, the ‘rules’ of the ‘rules-based order’ are not derived from international law; rather they are imposed by the US to serve its national interests. On this point, a 2022 report by the Council on Foreign Relations observed that ‘the United States has one of the worst records of any country in ratifying human rights and environmental treaties’.⁶⁸

The inhumanity of the ‘rules-based order’ has been on full display during Israel’s genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, which has received complete backing from the United States. Above all, it is not human rights, justice, or freedom that this order seeks to uphold, but a world that is dominated by the US and undergirded by a global network of over 900 US military bases – several hundred of which surround China.⁶⁹

The seismic shifts that are taking place in Northeast Asia are pushing the region towards war. During these times, peace movements in the region must unite under a common set of demands and principles, including the following:

1. **End JAKUS security cooperation.** Multilateral military agreements that isolate or target other countries, by their nature, tend to divide regions into opposing blocs or camps,

promoting tensions and military spending. The trilateral pact between the US, Japan, and South Korea is no different.

2. **End US war games.** While labelled as ‘routine’, these military exercises are hostile and provocative. For example, joint war games between the US and South Korea have rehearsed the launching of nuclear strikes against North Korea, ‘decapitation’ of its leadership, and a full-scale invasion. Meanwhile, US war games with Australia and the Philippines have rehearsed long-range strikes against the Chinese mainland. These hawkish activities close the door on diplomatic openings and leave targeted countries with no real choice but to mobilise their militaries in response.
3. **End US intervention.** For more than seventy years, the US has fanned the flames of conflict in Northeast Asia, particularly in the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait. Across the Asia-Pacific, peoples of the region must be allowed to determine their futures and paths to peace, free from foreign interference and militarism.
4. **Support each other’s struggles.** The struggle for peace in Northeast Asia must be regional. While it is easy to be absorbed in the immediate demands of one’s local struggle, the issues facing the region are interconnected. Addressing them requires a long-term vision and a commitment to strengthen all of these struggles. This requires organisations to actively participate in campaigns and struggles across the region, not just in one’s own country, such as the annual peace march in Okinawa that takes place each May,

commemorations of the 15 June 2000 inter-Korean summit, and other initiatives.

5. **Support frontline struggles.** While war and militarisation might seem abstract and distant from daily life, they are concrete and immediate for those living near the frontline sites of struggle, such as Kadena Air Base and Henoko Bay (in Okinawa) and the THAAD installation in Soseong-ri and naval base in Jeju (in South Korea). Struggles in these locations that in large part began as a response to the immediate, local impact that people felt in their daily lives offer foci of resistance that transform those involved and the broader public.

We are living in perilous times. It is imperative that we find common ground and understanding so that we can work together on tactical and strategic objectives. Our ability to do so will determine whether or not we can prevent war and achieve peace in the region and world, allowing us to turn our focus towards improving the well-being of people and the planet.





Captions

Page 4: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *I Ghosts*, 1950, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink and charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 7: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *II Fire*, 1950, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 11: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *III Water*, 1950, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 13: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *IV Rainbow*, 1951, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, and charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 15: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *V Boys and Girls*, 1951, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 17: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *VI Atomic Desert*, 1952, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 18: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *VII Bamboo Grove*, 1954, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 19: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *VIII Relief*, 1954, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Cover and Page 23: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *LX Yaizu*, 1955, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 26: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *X Petition*, 1955, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 28: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *XI Mother and Child*, 1959, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 30: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *XII Floating Lanterns*, 1968, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 31: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *XIII Death of the American Prisoners of War*, 1971, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 33: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *XIV Crows*, 1972, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

Page 34 and 37: Iri and Toshi Maruki, *XV Nagasaki*, 1982, from The Hiroshima Panels. Sumi ink, pigment, glue, charcoal or conté on paper, 180 × 720 cm.

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