

The Peoples of Asia Know the Cost of War: Hands off Asia!

The Eighth Asia Newsletter (2026)



Diego Rivera (Mexico), *Pesadilla de guerra, sueño de paz* (*Nightmare of war, dream of peace*), 1952.

Dear friends,

Greetings from the desk of **Tricontinental Asia**.

On 30 April 1975, a tank crashed through the gates of the Independence Palace in Saigon, Vietnam, ending three decades of war. Vietnam had defeated the most powerful military force the world had ever known – at the cost of over three million Vietnamese lives and 7.5 million tonnes of US bombs dropped across Indochina. But this was not only Vietnam’s story. It was the culmination of a long tradition – stretching back nearly a century – of the peoples of Asia and the Pacific organising against US militarism and wars of aggression on our soil.

That tradition is now more urgent than ever. As the US-imposed New Cold War arrives in the Asia-Pacific – with an expanding architecture of military bases, missile deployments, and aggressive pacts designed not only to encircle China but to discipline any state that dares to defend its sovereignty – it is worth returning to the history of how Asian peoples have confronted this threat before, and won.



Nakamura Hiroshi (Japan), *Sunagawa*, 1955.

The Missing Peace

In October 1952, during the US war on Korea, over 470 delegates from nearly 50 countries gathered in Beijing, China, for the Asia and Pacific Rim Peace Conference. These delegates were trade unionists, teachers, women’s activists, monks, cultural workers, and internationalists of all kinds. Roughly one third were women. In the conference hall, Mexican communist muralist Diego Rivera’s monumental painting, *Pesadilla de guerra, sueño de paz* (1952) (Nightmare of War, Dream of Peace), depicted faceless soldiers persecuting civilians amid the wars then raging in Korea, Vietnam, and Malaya. On the opposite wall hung Pablo Picasso’s *Dove of Peace* (1949). Below the murals, delegates signed copies of the **Stockholm Appeal** (1950) against nuclear weapons.

The conference was chaired by Chinese revolutionary leader Song Qingling (Madame Sun Yat-sen), who traced the meeting’s political lineage to a secret anti-imperialist conference held in Shanghai in 1933, during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria – convened in a dreary building in a Shanghai factory district where delegates sat on the floor. Nearly 20 years later, what had been clandestine was now a mass gathering: Korean delegates presented evidence of US biological warfare; resolutions demanded an end to the rearmament of Japan and the withdrawal of foreign military bases from the region.

This conference has been quietly erased from history, and both the copy and original of Rivera’s painting have since vanished. But the 1952 gathering was a crucial precursor to the **Bandung Spirit** – it was a platform to articulate and amplify the ideas of peace from an Asian perspective, which was inextricably linked to the demands for self-determination, sovereignty, and dignity, and directed squarely at the US-led military presence that was reshaping the region.



Yin Fukang (China), *Oppose the military provocations and threats of war of US imperialism!*, 1958.

A History of Resistance

What followed was decades of mass resistance against US militarism across the Asia-Pacific. In Okinawa, Japan, where roughly one-in-three civilians were killed during the 1945 **Battle of Okinawa**, the US sent survivors to internment camps and seized their land for building bases without consent. When Okinawans returned home, they found that the old Japanese airfield had been replaced by **Kadena Air Base** – now almost 20 square kilometres, 1.3 times the size of Tokyo’s Haneda Airport.

The island never regained its sovereignty; instead, the US military administration formalised its occupation. By the 1950s, US soldiers were using tanks, bulldozers, and bayonets to force farmers off their remaining land. As Miyume Tanji documents in *Myth, Protest and Struggle in Okinawa* (2006), the rent offered was less than two yen per *tsubo* – a fifth the price of a bottle of Coca-Cola – which 98% of landowners refused. Their **slogan** captured a truth that resonates today: ‘Money is for one year, but land is for ten thousand years’. Today, Okinawa represents 0.6% of the Japanese territory but 70% of its US bases.

Peoples across the Pacific – bearing the scars of 67 US nuclear **tests** in the Marshall Islands alone, with a combined yield equivalent to 1.6 Hiroshima bombs detonated every day for 12 years – forged their own front. The Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement, **launched** in Fiji in 1975, linked the struggle against nuclear contamination to the demand for sovereignty. At the 1980 conference in Hawaii, the movement added the word ‘Independent’ to its name, recognising that the demand to be nuclear free meant being free of the foreign military bases that bring weapons of mass destruction.

The most dramatic victory came in the Philippines. For decades, Filipino nationalists – led by senators Claro Recto, Lorenzo Tañada, and Jose Diokno – had argued that US military bases were instruments of neo-colonial control. As early as the 1950s, Recto warned that the bases would not defend the Philippines but could ‘become magnets for aggression instead’. Diokno, imprisoned for nearly two years under the dictatorial rule of Ferdinand Marcos’ martial law, founded the Anti-Bases Coalition in 1983. These decades of struggle converged in a single vote on 16 September 1991: the Senate of the Philippines rejected the US bases treaty, 12 to 11. The dissenters were later dubbed ‘The Magnificent 12’. Senator Aquilino Pimentel declared from the floor: ‘On this day, the day of our final deliverance, I hope, from the clutches of a colonial power, I say to those who threaten us with political oblivion or physical extinction for our vote of rejection: Go ahead, do your worst – because we will do our best!’

Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base were shut down and the Philippines became the first country in the world to force the US military out through a democratic process.



René Mederos (Cuba), *Untitled*, 1971.

The New Cold War

Today, US militarisation is creeping across the region, fuelling a New Cold War that threatens to engulf Asia.

Philippines. Under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the US and Philippines, signed by US President Barack Obama in 2014 and expanded under President Joe Biden in 2023, the US now has access to nine military sites across the Philippines – including bases in the Province of Cagayan, which faces the Taiwan Strait.

Japan. The Japanese government has doubled its military budget to 43 trillion yen (\$269 billion) over five years, purchased 400 US Tomahawk cruise missiles, and continues construction of a new US Marine base at Henoko, Okinawa – despite 72% of Okinawans voting against it in a 2019 referendum.

Australia. Under AUKUS, Australia will host rotational deployments of US nuclear-powered submarines and B-52 bombers, at an estimated cost of over \$250 billion Australian dollars (\$178 billion).

South Korea. The US maintains roughly 28,500 troops in South Korea, anchored by Camp Humphreys – the largest US overseas military installation in the world, built at a cost of over \$10 billion.

Taiwan. Washington has approved over \$20 billion in arms sales to Taiwan since 2019, including 66 F-16V fighter jets, Harpoon missile systems, and Abrams tanks — arming the island to the teeth in its campaign of confrontation with China.

Indonesia. The world's fourth-largest country is currently reviewing a US proposal seeking 'blanket overflight access' for military aircraft through Indonesian airspace.

This is the architecture of militarisation – designed to encircle China and punish countries for asserting their sovereignty, while subordinating the people of Asia to Washington's strategic interests.

The illegal US-Israeli war on Iran has confirmed that hosting a US military base is not a shield but a target. Across the Persian Gulf, some 40,000 US troops are stationed at over 20 installations, from Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar to the Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain – the very infrastructure from which the bombardment of Iran and Lebanon has been launched.

In Gaza, Palestine, over 72,000 Palestinians have been killed by US-backed Israeli aggression since October 2023 – a reminder that the US military machine operates as a single system from the Mediterranean to the Pacific.

Despite US ambitions and aggression, Asia has a deep, resilient tradition of anti-base, anti-war organising to draw on – from the 1933 Shanghai conference to the 1952 Beijing gathering, from Okinawa's farmers to the peoples of Philippines and the Pacific islands. Many of the organisations that carried these struggles still exist; what must be rebuilt is their mass character.

On the anniversary of Vietnam's liberation, the **International Peoples' Assembly** and Tricontinental:

Institute for Social Research are bringing together voices from across the region – Vietnam, Iran, the Philippines, Japan, China, and South Korea – to confront the reality of US militarism in Asia. The peoples of this region, through our difficult and hard-won histories of liberation, know the cost of war intimately. You can **register** for the webinar or watch the livestream **here**.

Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh, in his appeal to the nation 60 years ago, said: ‘Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom’. Today, concrete freedom means freedom from US military intervention and aggression.

Warmly,

Tings Chak and Atul Chandra

Tings Chak and Atul Chandra are the Asia co-coordinators of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.