Give Us Peace on Earth: The Forty-Seventh Newsletter (2024)



Heri Dono (Indonesia), *Two Guards Who Protect Their Leaders*, 2013.

Dear friends,

Greetings from the desk of **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**.

On **31 May**, the United States military endorsed a Statement of Principles for Indo-Pacific Defence Industrial Base Collaboration to strengthen military industry cooperation with its allies in the region. The principles outline commitments to initiatives such as the co-production of missile and rocket systems in

Australia, the co-development of hypersonic missile interceptors with Japan, and possible collaboration with South Korea on defence technologies, including artillery systems. This collaboration adds to the extensive network of Indo-Pacific partnerships that the United States has created since the end of World War II.

As part of this deepened partnership, on 15 November US Defence Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III embarked on a **tour** of the region that will include stops in Australia, Fiji, Laos, and the Philippines. Austin's tour began in Darwin, Australia, where he convened the fourteenth Trilateral Defence Ministers' Meeting (TDMM) with his Japanese and Australian counterparts; Australia is also home to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Tindal, where the US is co-funding **expansions** that will allow the base to house US-made nuclear-armed B-1 and B-52 bombers. In Laos, the defence secretary will attend the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus to discuss China's so-called 'aggression in the South China Sea'. The point of the tour is to underline the continuity of US policy in the region between the administrations of outgoing President Joe Biden and incoming President Donald Trump.



Rusiate Lali (Fiji), *Qilaiso 2*, 2017.

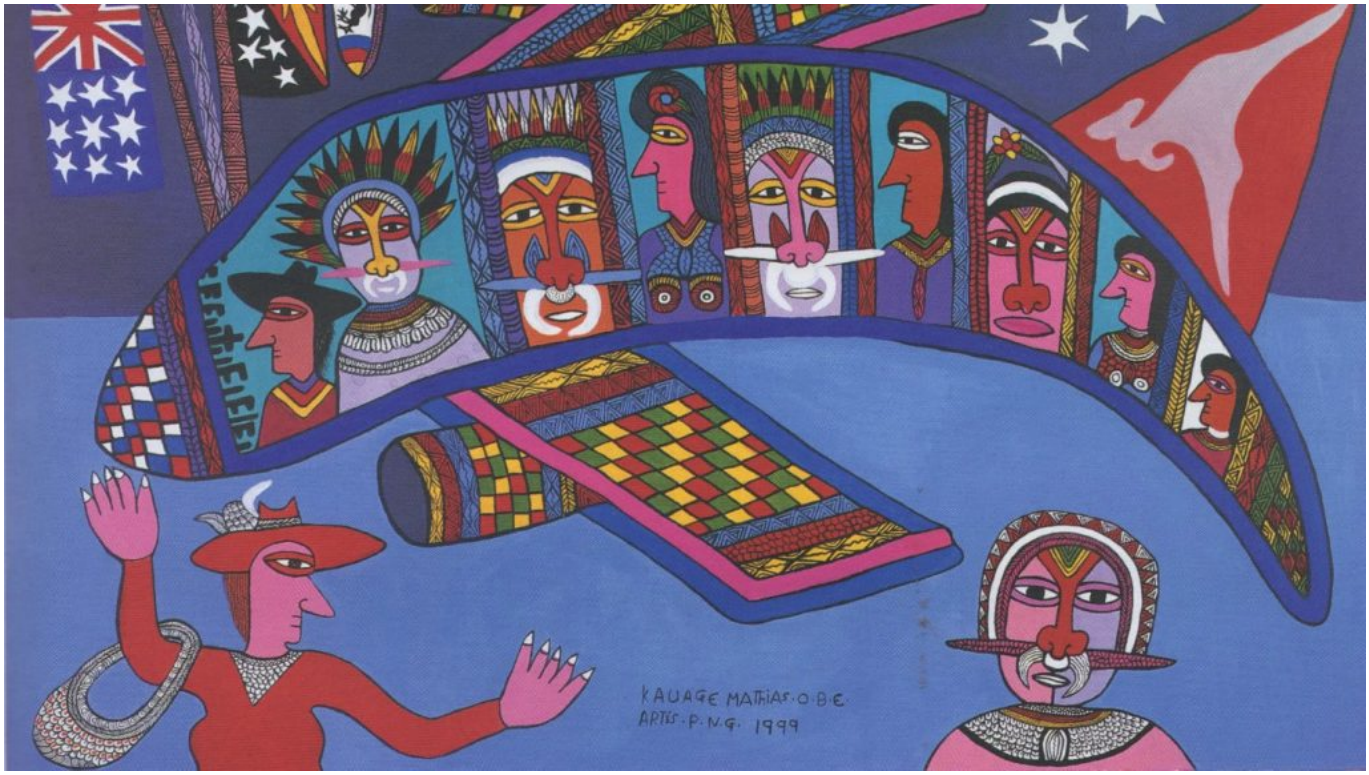
In early 2020, a group of people began discussing the need to create a platform to address the dangers of the US military build-up – both through its own military arsenal and its array of military alliances – along the coastline of East Asia. This build-up started to emerge after the US 'pivot to Asia', which **started** in 2011 under US President Barack Obama. The discussion led to the creation of the **No Cold War** collective, which was rooted in a **statement** signed by many individuals and organisations. The No Cold War collective held its first public **webinar** on 25 July 2020 and has since published 14 briefings on issues such as the war in **Ukraine** and the build-up of the US-NATO military machine in **northeast Asia**.

In the aftermath of the US election, No Cold War has released briefing no. 15, which explores what the second presidency of Donald Trump will mean for the world, with a focus on the US's New Cold War on China. The briefing is below:



On 6 November, Donald Trump was elected as the 47th President of the United States, ensuring he will return next January to the office he vacated in 2021 under the shadow of constitutional crisis and a failed far-right putsch. In doing so, he secured a more decisive and uncontested victory than in his first election in 2016, when he lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton while prevailing in the United States' Electoral College system – an arcane and profoundly undemocratic mechanism through which as little as **0.03%** of the country's voting population can decide the overall winner, with outsize consequences for the entire world due to US military and economic hegemony.

This time Trump scored over two million more votes than Vice President Kamala Harris, becoming the first Republican Party candidate in two decades to win the national popular vote. (This outcome had far more to do with the Democrats' loss of almost ten million votes since 2020 than with the marginal increase in Trump's support.) More consequentially, Trump swept all seven 'swing states' in the Electoral College.



Mathias Kauage (Papua New Guinea), *Kauage Flies to Scotland for Opening of New Museum of Contemporary Art*, 1999.

One of this election's most emblematic swing state outcomes was in Michigan, home to the country's largest proportion of Arab American voters. Here, the Biden-Harris administration's full-throated military and diplomatic support for Israel's genocidal onslaught on Gaza and Lebanon arguably sealed its ignominious defeat. In the Arab-majority city of Dearborn, Harris scored **less than half** of Biden's 2020 vote share, falling behind Trump while anti-genocide Green Party candidate Jill Stein surged to over 18%. Nationwide **exit polling** by the Council on American-Islamic Relations found that a stunning 53% of Muslim voters opted for Stein, recognising that both major parties are ineluctably invested in imperialist aggression abroad and violent repression of the Palestine solidarity movement at home.

While core elements of the traditional Democratic Party voter base have deserted the Biden-Harris administration over its murderous foreign policy, the incoming Trump presidency will not bring any relief to Palestinians after more than a year of full-scale genocide. Trump has stated on multiple occasions his intention to **let** the Netanyahu regime 'finish the job' in Gaza, and all indications suggest that he will maintain and indeed accelerate Biden's push for a 'new Middle East' fully subordinated to Zionism and US imperialism. Judging by his past and present bellicosity towards Iran – having assassinated Qassem Soleimani and unilaterally reneged from the Iran Nuclear Deal (formally the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) in his first term – he will likely display even fewer inhibitions about escalating the crisis into a full-

scale regional war. One clear indicator of this is Trump's choice of Iran hawk Marco Rubio as Secretary of State and of **Brian Hook** (author of the 'maximum pressure' strategy against Tehran in his first term) to oversee the transition.



Elmer Borlongan (Philippines), *The Happiest Place on Earth*, 2017.

The appointment of Rubio, who has historically been almost equally hawkish on Russia, seems to pour cold water on largely speculative hopes that Trump would at least de-escalate the NATO proxy war in Ukraine. Such hopes had been buoyed by his closest **foreign policy advisers**' plans to condition US military aid on Ukraine's willingness to negotiate and accept a temporary ceasefire with Russia, while threatening to 'open the floodgates' if Moscow in turn refuses this arrangement. This was motivated not by any principled commitment to diplomacy but by an equally belligerent realpolitik that envisions China as the United States' number one enemy and aims to redirect US military assets into an even more menacing encirclement of that country.

Trump insider Elbridge A. Colby has laid out an **exhaustive plan** to provoke China into a shooting war over Taiwan, which his proposed National Security Advisor Mike Waltz would be well-placed to execute. Indeed, Trump in his second term will almost certainly intensify the US hybrid war against China that escalated dramatically in his first term and continued unabated under Biden – not just in the military domain but in

information warfare and trade policy as well. In particular, he has proposed a minimum 10-20% tariff on all imports into the United States and a steep 60% tariff on those from China. This would sharply increase consumer prices and thereby **cost** the average household around $3,000 per year according to the Tax Policy Center.



Malangatana Valente Ngwenya (Mozambique), *Faces*, 1972.

Such a policy would only further immiserate a population already reeling from the Biden-Harris administration's attack on working-class living standards – the proximate cause of the Democrats' collapse. Real weekly wages have noticeably **declined** over the course of Biden's term in office and rates of inequality increased (as of December 2023 one in nine adult women were living in poverty, including 16.6% of Black women and 16.8% of Latina women). At the same time, US billionaires' aggregate wealth **increased** by an astonishing 88% (to $5.5 trillion) between March 2020 and March 2024, while capital wealth as indicated by the S&P 500 index rose by 72%. Small wonder that Trump **won** a majority of households earning under $100,000 a year (including a massive 74% of those reporting 'severe hardship' due to inflation) while losing the $100,000+ bracket: a complete reversal from the partisan breakdown in 2020 and all previous presidential elections in living memory.

Ultimately, such economic grievances garnered Trump large enough winning margins that the third-party vote share proved not at all decisive: a further humiliation for the Democrats, who mounted Herculean **efforts** to keep progressive anti-genocide candidates off the ballot. At first glance, the fact that many voters were disappointed with the failures of the Biden-Harris administration's massive domestic spending initiatives would appear to complicate narratives that directly attribute Harris's defeat to Biden's foreign policy. But one can hardly call a country's domestic budget 'domestic' when it includes its military budget – including

maintaining a globe-spanning empire of over 900 military bases, investing **$175 billion** into the proxy war in Ukraine and **$18 billion** into Israel's genocide, and when the actual military spending stands at more than double the official figure – an astounding **$1.5 trillion** in 2022 alone. Trumpism, in all its paradoxical extremes of isolationism and belligerence, populism and nativism, is but another morbid symptom of this violent imperial decline.



Andy Leleisi'uao (Aotearoa), *Harmonic People*, 2017.

These morbid symptoms, as noted in briefing no. 15, reflect the desire on the part of the US ruling class for a war to undermine the economic advances made by China. This is dangerous. We might want to listen to those who know what wars bring. Cao Cao, a warlord during the Eastern Han dynasty, wrote a charming **poem** that provides such a warning:

> Lice and fleas infest the long-worn armor;
> Tens of thousands of civilians perished.
> Bones lie bare in the fields,
> Not a rooster crow heard within a thousand li.
> Out of a hundred, lives one;
> The very thought of it breaks my heart.

Warmly,

Vijay