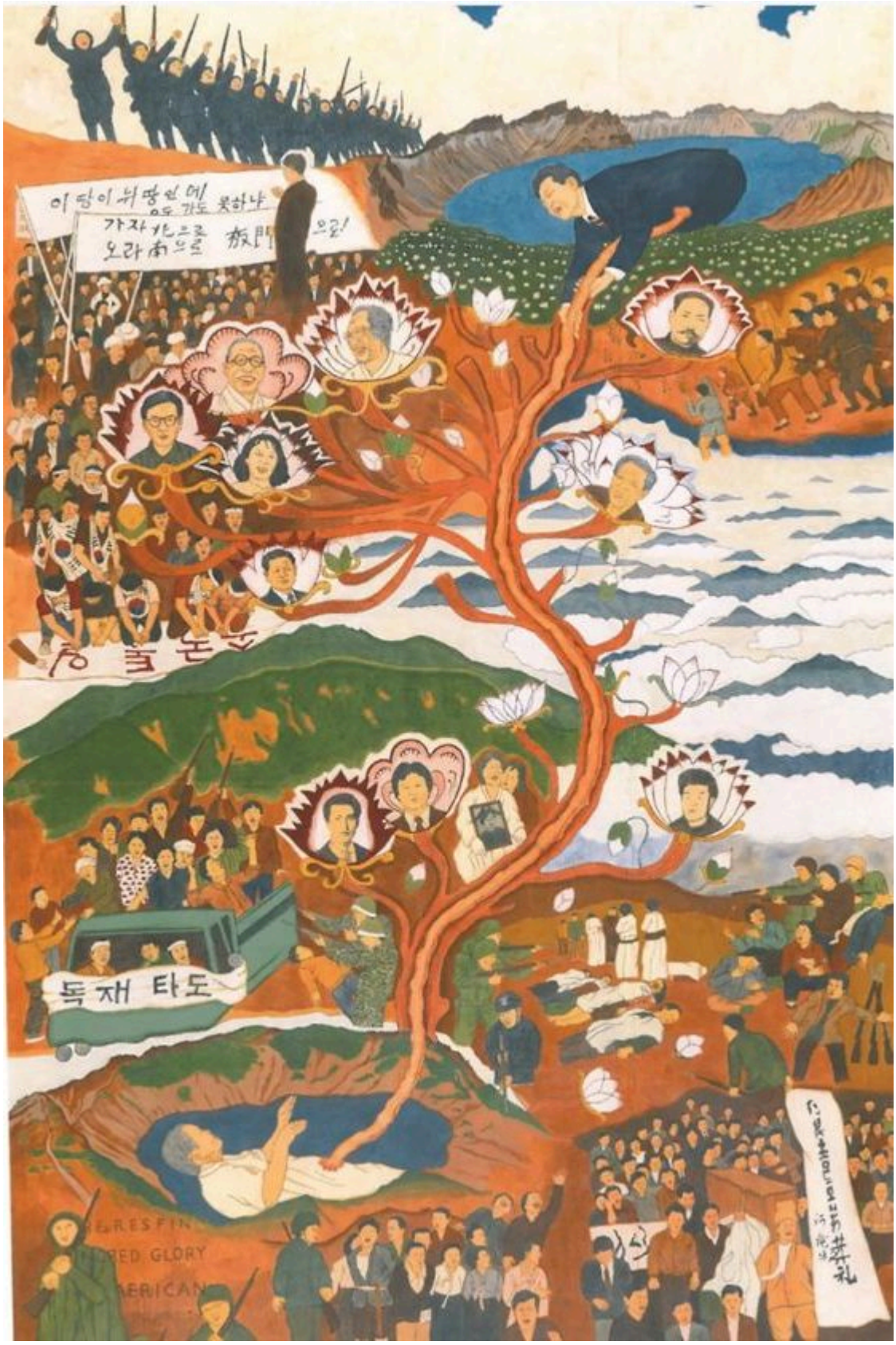
War Looks Just as War Looks: Dismal and Ugly: The Forty-Fourth Newsletter (2023)



Sangho Lee (South Korea), *Long for Korean Reunification*, 2014.

Dear friends,

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

It is impossible to look away from what the Israeli government is doing to Palestinians not only in Gaza, but also in the West Bank. Waves of Israeli aircraft pummel Gaza, destroying communications networks and thereby preventing families from reaching each other, journalists from reporting on the destruction, and Palestinian authorities and United Nations agencies from providing humanitarian assistance. This violence has spurred on protests across the world, with the planet's billions outraged by the asymmetrical destruction of the Palestinian people. If the Israeli government claims that it is conducting a form of 'politicide' – excising organised Palestinian forces from Gaza – the world sees Israeli aircrafts and tanks as conducting nothing but a genocide, displacing and massacring Palestine refugees in Gaza, 81% of whose residents were **expelled** from, or are the descendants of those who were expelled from, what was declared Israel in 1948. All images coming out of Gaza show that Israel's assault is unrelenting, sparing neither children nor women nor the elderly and sick. The failure of the world to stop massacre after massacre shows us the deep brokenness of our international system.

That broken international system, rooted in the UN, brought us the conflict in Ukraine and is now egging on a dangerous confrontation in Northeast Asia, with flashpoints around the Korean peninsula and Taiwan. While there are **indications** that the US and China will restart the military talks that were suspended in August 2022 when former US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in an act of reckless adventurism, this does not indicate lowered tensions in the waters around Northeast Asia. For this reason, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, **No Cold War**, and the **International Strategy Centre** have partnered to produce briefing no. 10, *The US and NATO Militarise Northeast Asia*, which makes up the rest of this week's newsletter.



On 22 October, the United States, Japan, and South Korea held their first-ever **joint aerial drill**. The military exercise took place after US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol **gathered** at Camp David in August 'to inaugurate a new era of trilateral partnership'. Although North Korea has frequently been invoked as a regional bogeyman to justify militarisation, the formation of a trilateral alliance between the US, Japan, and South Korea is a key element of Washington's efforts to contain China. The militarisation of Northeast Asia threatens to divide the region into antagonistic blocs, undermining decades of mutually beneficial economic cooperation, and raises the likelihood of a conflict breaking out, in particular over Taiwan, entangling neighbouring countries through a web of alliances.

The Remilitarisation of Japan

In recent years, encouraged by the United States, Japan has undergone its most extensive militarisation since the end of the Second World War. After Japan's defeat, a new postwar constitution was drafted by US occupation officials and came into effect in 1947. Under this 'peace constitution', Japan **pledged** to 'forever renounce war […] and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes'. However, with the Chinese Revolution in 1949 and the breakout of the Korean War in 1950, the US quickly reversed its course in Japan. According to US State Department **historians**, 'the idea of a re-armed and militant Japan no longer alarmed US officials; instead, the real threat appeared to be the creep of communism, particularly in Asia'. The cause of amending and circumventing Japan's 'peace constitution' was taken up by the right-wing nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which **received** millions of dollars in support from the US Central Intelligence Agency during the Cold War and has ruled the country almost without interruption (except for 1993–1994 and 2009–2012) since 1955.

Over the past decade, the LDP has transformed Japan's defence policy. In 2014, unable to amend the constitution, the LDP government led by Shinzo Abe 're-interpreted' it to allow for **'proactive pacifism'** and **lifted** a ban on Japanese troops engaging in combat overseas, enabling the country to participate in military interventions to aid allies such as the US. In 2022, the Kishida administration **labeled** China 'the greatest strategic challenge ever to securing the peace and stability of Japan' and announced plans to double military spending to 2% of gross domestic product (on par with NATO countries) by 2027, overturning Japan's postwar cap that limited military spending to 1% of GDP. The administration also ended a **policy** dating back to 1956 that limited Japan's missile capability to defend against incoming missiles and adopted a policy that allows for counter-strike abilities. This move has paved the way for Japan to **purchase** 400 US Tomahawk missiles beginning in 2025, with the ability to strike Chinese and Russian naval bases located on the countries' eastern coasts.



Shigeru Onishi (Japan), *Flickering Aspect*, 1950s.

Absolving Japanese Colonialism

Historically, Washington's efforts to create multilateral alliances in the Asia-Pacific have failed due to the legacy of Japanese colonialism. During the Cold War, the US resorted to a network of bilateral alliances with countries in the region known as the **San Francisco System**. The initial step in creating this system was the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951), which established peaceful relations between the Allied Powers and Japan. To expedite the integration of Japan as an ally, the US **excluded** the victims of Japanese colonialism (including China, the Kuomintang-led administration in Taiwan, and both Koreas) from the San Francisco peace conference and excused Tokyo from taking responsibility for its colonial and war crimes (including massacres, sexual slavery, human experimentation, and forced labour).

The new trilateral alliance between the US, Japan, and South Korea has been able to overcome previous impediments because South Korea's Yoon administration has waived away Japan's responsibility for the

crimes committed during its colonial rule over Korea (1910–1945). More specifically, the Yoon administration **abandoned** a 2018 South Korean Supreme Court ruling holding Japanese companies such as Mitsubishi responsible for the forced labour of Koreans. Rather than finally being held accountable, Japan has once again been let off the hook.



Lim Eung Sik (South Korea), *Looking for Work*, 1953.

Towards an Asian NATO?

In 2022, NATO **named** China a security challenge for the first time. That year's summit was also the first **attended** by leaders from the Asia-Pacific region, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand (these four countries **participated** again in 2023). Meanwhile, in May, it was reported that NATO was **planning** to open a 'liaison office' in Japan, though the proposal appears to have been **shelved** – for now.

The US-Japan-South Korea trilateral alliance is a major step towards achieving NATO-level capabilities in Asia, namely interoperability with respect to armed forces, infrastructure, and information. The agreement reached at the Camp David meeting in August **commits** each country to annual meetings and military exercises. These war exercises allow the three militaries to practice sharing data and coordinating their activities in real time. In addition, the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) between Japan and South Korea – much sought after by the US – **expands** military intelligence sharing between the two countries to not only be 'limited to the DPRK's missiles and nuclear programs but also includ[e] the threats from China and Russia'. This allows the US, Japan, and South Korea to develop a common operational picture, the foundation of interoperability in the Northeast Asian military theatre.



Yuta Niwa (Japan), *Exterminating a Tiger-Wolf-Catfish*, 2021.

Waging Peace

Earlier this year, in reference to the Asia-Pacific, US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns **declared** that his country is 'the leader in this region'. While China has proposed a concept of 'indivisible security', meaning the security of one country is dependent on the security of all, the US is taking a hostile approach that seeks to form exclusive blocs. Washington's hegemonic attitude towards Asia is stoking tensions and pushing the region towards conflict and war – particularly over Taiwan, which Beijing has **called** a 'red line' issue. Defusing the situation in Northeast Asia will require moving away from a strategy that is centred on maintaining US dominance. Those positioned to lead this movement are the people who are already struggling on the frontlines, from **Gangjeong villagers** who have opposed a naval base for US warships since 2007 and **Okinawans** fighting to no longer be the US's unsinkable aircraft carrier to the people of Taiwan who may ultimately have the most to lose from war in the region.



Northeast Asia has a long tradition of battles that fight to establish the good side of history against the ugly and dismal side. Kim Nam-ju (1946–1994) was a warrior of one of these battles, a poet and a militant in the *minjung* ('people's') movement against the dictatorships in South Korea, which imprisoned him, and many others, from 1980 to 1988. Here is his poem on the Gwangju Massacre in 1980:

> It was a day in May.
> It was a day in May 1980.
> It was a night in May 1980, in Gwangju.

At midnight I saw
the police replaced by combat police.
At midnight I saw
the combat police replaced by the army.
At midnight I saw
American civilians leaving the city.
At midnight I saw
all the vehicles blocked, trying to enter the city.

Oh, what a dismal midnight it was!
Oh, what a deliberate midnight it was!

It was a day in May.
It was a day in May 1980.
It was a day in May 1980, in Gwangju.

At noon I saw
a troop of soldiers armed with bayonets.
At noon I saw
a troop of soldiers like an invasion by a foreign nation.
At noon I saw
a troop of soldiers like a plunderer of people.
At noon I saw
a troop of soldiers like an incarnation of the devil.

Oh, what a terrible noon it was!
Oh, what a malicious noon it was!

It was a day in May.
It was a day in May 1980.
It was a night in May 1980, in Gwangju.

At midnight
the city was a heart poked like a beehive.
At midnight
the street was a river of blood running like lava.

At 1 o'clock
the wind stirred the blood-stained hair of a young, murdered woman.
At midnight
the night gorged itself on a child's eyes, popped out like bullets.
At midnight
the slaughterers kept moving along the mountain of corpses.

Oh, what a horrible midnight it was!
Oh, what a calculated midnight of slaughter it was!

It was a day in May.
It was a day in May 1980.

At noon
the sky was a cloth of crimson blood.
At noon
on the streets, every other house was crying.
Mudeung Mountain curled up her dress and hid her face.
At noon
the Youngsan River held her breath and died.

Oh, not even the Guernica massacre was as ghastly as this one!
Oh, not even the devil's plot was as calculated as this one!

Change the word 'Gwangju' for 'Gaza' today and the poem remains vital. Our look at the reality unfolding in Northeast Asia should sharpen our understanding of what is going on in Southwest Asia – in Gaza, a frontline of a world struggle that bleeds with no end in sight.

Warmly,

Vijay