

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

IMPERIALISM, CONFLICT AND FOSTERING PEACE IN ASIA

Pursuing the path towards peace: People's resistance and collective solutions

Jiten Yumnam

Center for Research and Advocacy-Manipur

Conflict and Imperialism in Asia

The Asia Pacific region is afflicted by multiple crises, including direct conflict and wars. Border and geopolitical tensions among imperialist and capitalist countries, in efforts to gain access to trading routes and natural resources, contribute to these crises.

Imperialist and capitalist countries continue to rely on violence, from warfare to structural oppression, to establish control for political dominance and economic exploitation of the Asia Pacific, thereby undermining peace in the region.

U.S. imperialism fuels much of today's wars and conflicts. Imperialist powers, especially the US, rely on systemic violence that reshapes economies and societies to favor their interests, creating conflict, instability, and disturbing peace in the region. As an imperialist power, the US subverts the national sovereignty of countries in the Asia Pacific. They subtly or aggressively intrude in the internal affairs of countries by colluding with the countries' oligarchs and bureaucrat-capitalists in perpetrating and condoning extreme forms of violence with impunity. These intrusions stir conflict scenarios with China and Russia.

The genocide in Palestine is laid bare to the world's eyes¹. The ongoing conflict, humanitarian crisis, and genocide in Palestine, rooted in a long history of colonial occupation

¹ (2025, September 16). Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip, UN Commission finds. UN OHCHR.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds>

and geopolitical manipulation abetted by US imperialism, remain a key flashpoint in the Asia-Pacific. For decades, the Palestinian people have endured occupation, dispossession, and systematic violence. Since October 7, 2023, more than 65,000 Palestinians have been killed, including over 20,000 children. Over 70 percent of Gaza's civilian infrastructure lies in ruins; famine has been deliberately weaponized. The genocide in Palestine stands as a brutal manifestation of imperialism and neocolonialism, as the US advances plans to displace Gaza's population and transform the devastated state into a so-called "Riviera."

There is an alarming possibility of the Palestinian genocide being replicated across the region. In preparing for direct wars and suppressing movements and resistance against imperialism, states continue to employ extreme violence and systematically erode people's fundamental rights. Crimes against humanity and state repression persist in conflict-afflicted areas such as Kashmir, Manipur, Central India, West Papua, the Philippines, and Myanmar. The imposition of neoliberal policies closely intertwined with militarism, repression, and the destruction of indigenous cultures and institutions exacerbates tensions and resistance against imperialism. As a result, peace with justice remains distant and elusive across the Asia Pacific region.

Heightened Geopolitics and Conflict

Asia Pacific continues to record escalating geopolitical tensions. Efforts to control land, populations, resources, shipping lanes, trade, and supply routes such as the Suez Canal, Bay of Bengal, Malacca straits, and South China Sea are linked to the heightened conflict and tensions in the region. Competing geopolitical interests and overlapping spheres of influence, for example, India's Act East Policy (AEP), China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the US's Indo Pacific Strategy, Japan's Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy, the EU's Global Gateway initiatives, serve as major sources of tension, rivalry, and instability in the Asia Pacific.

Infrastructure projects pursued by the US and its allied countries are often backed by international financial institutions. They are primarily designed to advance geopolitical and strategic interests. For instance, to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the US, Japan, and the European Union have supported India's connectivity project under the Act East Policy. The Asia Development Bank, World Bank, and other IFIs are financing road, energy, and extractive projects in Northeast India, including the construction of roads. Mizoram to connect Myanmar's Sittwe Port as part of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project

as part of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, linking the Bay of Bengal with India's northeastern frontier.

Cooperation between India and Japan in various infrastructure projects aims to counterbalance China's regional influence but has also heightened tensions. The Japanese effort to fund road projects in Arunachal Pradesh, NE India, has drawn objections from China, which claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of South Tibet. In response, China condemned the 2017 India-Japan Joint Statement on infrastructure cooperation and the establishment of the India-Japan Act East Forum.²

Conflict and fragility across Asia have been induced with the tacit role and support of the US to control the land and resources, as evident in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, and Yemen. These conflicts illustrate ongoing struggles over control of trade routes, sea lanes, land borders, strategic territories, and vital resources, including oil and critical minerals.

The US effort to maintain its global hegemony has fueled much of the instability across the region. Expanding military alliances such as the AUKUS and QUAD further intensify regional insecurity.³ The influx of US weapons and military technology in the Pacific has exacerbated tensions, especially with China⁴. Wars of aggression and increased militarization are closely tied to the unrestrained arms trade and the continued supply of military support from the US and its allies. Military expenditures divert essential resources from basic social services. The defense spending of Asia-Pacific, estimated at 503 billion USD⁵, could have addressed the region's most urgent needs in education, health, and employment. Notably, China and India hold the record as the second and third highest military spenders, as of 2022⁶.

² Apurva. (2017, September 16). No third-party meddling in Northeast: China on Japan FDI plan. Indian Express.

³ Aparna Pande. (2025, August 1). The Quad in an "America First" World. *The Diplomat*. <https://www.hudson.org/security-alliances/quad-america-first-world-aparna-pande>

⁴ (2022, September 27). US defends arms sales to Pakistan following criticism from India. Al Jazeera.

⁵ (2025, February 24). Global Snapshot: The Asia-Pacific Defense Environment. Defense One.

⁶ (2022, April 25). India's military spending 3rd highest in world after US, China: Reports. Deccan Chronicles. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/250422/indias-military-spending-3rd-highest-in-world-after-us-china-report.html>

New military and security agreements between the US and several allied countries in the Asia Pacific are fueling an arms race and pushing the region closer to direct conflict. These agreements, embodied in treaties, often involve expanding stockpiles of nuclear weapons, establishing new military bases or facilities across the Middle East, Central Asia, South East Asia, East Asia, and the Indian Ocean, and conducting regular joint war exercises. This rapid militarization has subjected indigenous peoples and local communities to violence and displacement, while women in areas such as Okinawa, Japan, and the Philippines continue to suffer from sexual abuse and exploitation by stationed troops⁷. This raises a fundamental question: Can there be peace in the Asia Pacific amid expanding military bases, defense collaborations, and the systemic violence imposed on its peoples?

Across the region, movements for self-determination and national liberation continue to be suppressed, and authoritarian regimes receive the support of imperialist powers. These regimes often employ proxy conflicts, mercenary troops, and paramilitary groups to sow division and maintain their control. Militarization and land occupation have become the stark realities for many indigenous communities across the Asia-Pacific, resulting in widespread violence, desecration of cultural sites, food insecurity, hunger, displacement, and a growing humanitarian crisis.

Conflict and Control of Land, Resources

The Indo-Pacific region has become a new frontier of imperialist expansion, where power blocs such as the US and its allies compete for dominance and influence. The Global North continues to weaponize debt, aid, and investment to extract resources and secure strategic advantages. The US and major powers in the Global North continue to pressure resource-rich yet economically vulnerable nations into unequal free trade agreements and neoliberal conditionalities. These arrangements facilitate the unabated plunder of natural resources, extraction and export of critical minerals, ensure control over resource-rich territories through militarization, and guarantee profits for the ruling elite. The economic crisis in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and several other countries across Asia is a direct result of a neoliberal economic framework that is abetted by predatory financing from the US and other capitalist countries⁸.

⁷ Justin, M. (2025, April 24). Two US marines investigated over alleged rape at military base in Okinawa. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/24/us-marines-investigated-alleged-rape-military-base-okinawa-japan>

⁸ Pitasanna, S. (2022, July 22). Sri Lanka Is A Neoliberal Failed State. *Colombo Telegraph*.

Imperialist and authoritarian regimes have deepened collaboration for joint exploration of critical minerals and the development of strategic infrastructure to serve geopolitical, military, and economic interests. In October 2024, India and the US signed an agreement to expand and diversify supply chains for critical minerals⁹. International Financial Institutions, multinational corporations, and developed countries are now mobilizing financing for large-scale mining projects – an agenda reinforced in the outcome document of the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development held in Seville, Spain, this year. This intensified conflict on land and resource control has contributed to the mounting tension across the region.

The US continues to assert its economic might by enforcing lopsided tariff rates, penalizing nations that purchase Russian Oil, and imposing economic sanctions on countries that defy its geopolitical interests. The US military foothold in the Middle East, for instance, is meant primarily to [advance and protect its interest in oil reserves and other resources](#) (Chomsky, 2004). Control over critical minerals and their supply chains often brings conflict, instability and fragility especially in indigenous peoples' territories where the minerals are found, such as Myanmar and West Papua. [India](#) and the [United States](#) are exploring ways to tap [Myanmar's rare earth](#) reserves in conflict-afflicted Kachin State, to also counter Chinese control¹⁰.

The pursuit of critical minerals and mining profits underpins the US military-industrial complex, ensuring enormous gains for weapons and manufacturers such as Lockheed Martin and Boeing. Resource extraction and plunder by the US, Australian, British, and Canadian corporations with allied authoritarian undemocratic countries in places like West Papua, North East India, and the Philippines, for profit, has led to land grabs, displacement, environmental destruction, climate change, conflict, fragility, and human rights violations.

Climate Crisis

The climate crisis and its devastating impact on the people and the environment remain among the most urgent challenges in the region. Neoliberal policies continue to promote false

<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lanka-is-a-neoliberal-failed-state/>

⁹ (2024, October 4). India, U.S. sign MoU on critical minerals supply chains. The Hindu.

¹⁰ Maria Siow, (2025, September 18). Why plans by India and US to tap Myanmar's rare earths are fraught with risks. South China Morning Post. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/economics/article/3326004/why-plans-india-and-us-tap-myanmars-rare-earths-are-fraught-risks>

climate solutions and unsustainable development models that harm the land, ecosystems, and climate itself. IFIs and corporate-led development agendas further push for commercially-driven climate solutions that prioritize profit over people and the planet.

Under the guise of renewable energy, these false solutions have proven disastrous. Large-scale dam projects, promoted as tools for climate mitigation, often lead to ecological destruction and endanger communities. The 1200 MW Teesta III Hydroelectric project in Sikkim, for instance, was severely damaged by glacial melting intensified by the climate crisis itself. Dam building, aggressively pursued for a climate solution, is also weaponized. They are used to control water flows and as instruments of war, deliberately flooding and damaging downstream areas, with disregard for the lives of people¹¹.

The drive to mine and control critical minerals to sustain capitalist economies, the global war industry, and sustain the US global hegemony amidst its decline, undermines the integrity of forests, wetlands, agriculture, land, and other vital ecosystems – the very biodiversity is essential for absorbing greenhouse gases and mitigating the worsening effects of climate change. False climate solutions disturb peace and heighten fragility within communities. Achieving a truly green and just transition through people-centered policies requires holding imperialism accountable for its historic and ongoing destruction of the planet.

CSOs Shrinking Space / Media Control and Manipulation

The pursuit of militarization, US-led wars of aggression, and the control of natural resources and critical minerals are accompanied by intensified repression of civil societies and people's movements. Across the world, people asserting their rights and fighting for a holistic, multidimensional, and justice-based peace are met with state repression. In highly militarized societies, the people endure daily surveillance, intimidation, and severe restrictions on freedom of movement.

The deliberate weakening of laws, creation of disabling environments for civil society, and erosion of what little democratic space remains have become defining features of imperialism in the region. The longest internet ban is recorded in Manipur, spewing

¹¹ (2025, September 5). Abid, H. Has India 'weaponised water' to deliberately flood Pakistan?.

misinformation through state-controlled media. The attack on civil society is a clear attack on democracy and democratic values. Emergency laws, namely, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, National Security Act, 1980, have been applied in North East India to subdue people's self-determination and to control civil society. Political repression and war crimes faced by people's movements in developing countries, exacerbated by US warmongering as governments strengthen their military cooperation with the US.

Conclusions

The Asia Pacific region remains beset by multiple conflicts fueled by imperialism and intensifying US-China tensions. Imperialism continues to shape the region, where peace remains elusive. The rise of authoritarian regimes and the deepening control of capitalist interests reveal how governments have abdicated responsibility for people's rights and welfare and allowed corporations and IFIs to plunder land and resources. Genuine peace demands people-centered policies, respect for self, respect for self-determination, and an end to extractive, genocidal, and repressive practices.

Amid worsening humanitarian, climate, and development crises, developed countries led by the US continue to shy away from their historic responsibilities, prioritizing defense spending and the military-industrial complex over human survival. Securing peace requires the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops and military bases across the Asia Pacific and the repeal of repressive emergency laws that subdue people's movements.

The violence of imperialism has been met with people's resistance. Revolutionary struggles denounce imperialist violence, decolonization, imperialism, and militarism for a just and equitable world. People's struggle to attain peace that is holistic, multi-dimensional, and justice-based.

Strengthening solidarity, support, and coordination among people's movements against imperialist war, military bases, economic aggression, and fascist repression is critical for securing genuine peace. Collective struggle, learning, and solidarity are the key to victory, drawing inspiration from the courage and determination. The Gen Z uprising for genuine democracy in Nepal, the people's uprising to end genocide in Palestine, and the tireless efforts of people across Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and North East India, and the rest of the Asia-Pacific region to end neoliberal policies, militarization, and repression are beacons of hope to foster peace in the region. States, institutions should uphold their binding legal

obligations to end the genocide, restore justice, dignity, and the right of self-determination of all struggling peoples.

Struggling peoples advocate and strengthen organizing and mobilizing for a peace that prioritizes social justice, access to land, food sovereignty. Uphold peace that is holistic, multi-dimensional, and justice-based. Foster unity and strengthen people's solidarity and struggles to people solidarity to resist imperialism and militarism. Strengthen grassroots mobilization, networks, and people's resistance against militarization and imperialism. Let us draw inspiration from our resistance and work collectively toward a more just, equitable, and peaceful world to defeat imperialism, capitalism, and colonialism. People's power can defeat imperialism! Down with imperialism! Long live people's struggles! Long live international solidarity!