

## At the Eye of the Imperialist Storm: The Situation in the Asia Pacific

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The Asia Pacific region is home to 4.72 billion people, representing the majority of the world's population. Women constitute a significant portion of this population, accounting for 67%, while the youth, aged 15 to 24, make up 15% or approximately 1.2 billion people.

The contradictions between workers and the ruling class continue to deepen across the region. Wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few while millions struggle to survive. In many countries, the richest 10% control more than half of the national income, starkly highlighting the widening gap between those who produce society's wealth and those who benefit from it. The Asia Pacific now has the highest number of billionaires in the world at 981 – a figure growing faster than any other region, even as workers, peasants, and various sectors in the society face increasing precarity and exploitation.

This prosperity for the few stands in stark contrast to the daily hardships faced by the people. Around 320 million people live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than 2.15 USD per day. Hunger and food insecurity are widespread, with half of the world's moderately to severely food-insecure population concentrated in the Asia Pacific, and 70% of them in South Asia. These conditions underscore the systemic failure to guarantee the most basic rights to food and livelihood.

Unemployment and underemployment remain pressing challenges. According to World Bank estimates, the region's unemployment rate was 3.9% in 2023, while the ILO places it slightly higher at 4.2%, equivalent to 88.5 million unemployed. An additional 164 million continue to seek work but remain unable to secure jobs, with youth unemployment at a staggering 13.9%. Meanwhile, 50% of workers receive only 10% of total labor income, reflecting some of the highest levels of inequality globally.

Informal and insecure work is prevalent. At least 1.2 billion workers operate in the informal economy without contracts, social protection, or fair wages. In developing and

emerging economies in the Asia Pacific, informal employment reaches 71%, compared to only 22% in advanced economies, revealing how deeply exploitation shapes the daily lives of workers.

The logic of capitalism reinforces these conditions. It requires the continuous creation of a vast reserve army of labor – a surplus population kept in precarity to drive down wages and intensify competition among workers. This “race to the bottom” is systemic, ensuring that profits remain high while livelihoods are pushed to the edge. Through labor export policies, wage suppression, and deregulation, governments have effectively become traffickers of their own people, facilitating the commodification of labor for global capital.

These realities present a stark truth: while the ruling few amass unimaginable wealth, the vast majority remain trapped in poverty, hunger, and insecurity. The contradiction between the rich and the poor is not theoretical; rather, it is the lived experience of billions in the Asia Pacific region. Under imperialism, there can be no genuine recovery or relief, only deeper exploitation disguised as development. Understanding these regional trends and their relationship to the global situation is crucial for charting a comprehensive approach to people’s struggles and forging a new path toward a just, equitable, and inclusive Asia Pacific region.

### **IFIs and Trade Blocs: Navigating Regional Integration and Uneven Gains**

Major trade blocs continue to shape the Asia Pacific region’s economic landscape. These include the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). These blocs continue to exert substantial influence on trade, investment, and production with uneven impact across countries and social strata in the region. APEC, with 21 member economies, was established to promote trade and investment liberalization across the region. RCEP, which came into force in 2022, brings together a large portion of the Asia Pacific economies, creating the world’s largest trading bloc in terms of participating countries and population. CPTPP, while smaller in membership, offers deeper liberalization and governance in areas such as investment protection, services trade, labor, and environment.

Membership in these trade blocs has expanded market access for capitalist enterprises, attracted foreign direct investment, and integrated firms into global value chains. However, the benefits are uneven. Countries with advanced industrial bases often capture the bulk of the gains, while underdeveloped economies struggle to compete or secure dividends. Trade liberalization has exacerbated inequalities, as gains accrue mainly to corporations and regions already integrated into global production. Workers, small producers, and marginalized populations continue to face intensified competition, low wages, and job displacement.

In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan face pressure to liberalize their agricultural and mineral sectors, leaving small farmers vulnerable. In North East Asia, while Japan and South Korea consolidate high-value manufacturing and services, less industrialized regions of China and Mongolia see growing inequality and labor precarity. In the Pacific, countries like Papua New Guinea and Fiji face challenges integrating into global markets without compromising local livelihoods and their environmental sustainability.

International financial institutions (IFIs) further reinforce these inequalities. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is the principal IFI in the region, extending loans, grants, and technical assistance primarily to sovereign governments. Its major shareholders include Japan and the United States (each holding 15.6% of total shares), followed by China (6.4%), India (6.3%), and Australia (5.8%). As of 2022, most of ADB's portfolio is composed of sovereign loans, which increase developing countries' exposure to external debt. Rising debt heightens vulnerability to currency devaluations, spikes in borrowing costs, and other global financial shocks, undermining development and deepening inequality.

In the Philippines, ADB-backed projects illustrate how IFIs promote modernization under the guise of a “just transition”. The Davao Public Transport Modernization Project, approved in 2023, phases out thousands of public utility jeepneys in favor of an electric-bus fleet, aiming to serve 800,000 passengers daily and cut greenhouse-gas emissions by 60%. Although the project includes a social development program for affected drivers, operators, and allied workers, questions remain about the adequacy of livelihood support and protection for informal transport workers.

Beyond transport, ADB's clean-energy initiatives, such as the Energy Transition Mechanism (ETM) partnership with the Philippines and Indonesia, and the 2024 2.85 million

USD Energy Transition Support Program, aim to retire polluting assets and boost renewable energy investments. While these programs are framed as socially inclusive, they reflect a broader pattern in which IFIs drive structural change through privatization, sectoral restructuring, and integration into global markets. This mechanism often shifts the burden of adjustment onto workers, small producers, and informal sector participants, exposing the limits of “just transition” rhetoric in ensuring people’s development.

For over eight decades, the IMF-WB has acted as an instrument of global monopoly finance capital. These undemocratic and unaccountable institution have systematically facilitated the extraction of wealth and natural resources from the Global South under the guise of “development” and “structural adjustment”. In the region, their interventions have frequently exacerbated social inequality and economic dependency rather than fostering genuine progress. Historical and recent examples illustrate this dynamic. During the 1997 to 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, IMF-imposed austerity in Indonesia led to mass layoffs and extreme poverty, sparking widespread protests. In Thailand, IMF-WB structural reforms promoting privatization of public utilities and deregulation met strong opposition from labor unions and peasant movements. In the Philippines, decades of conditional loans tied to agricultural liberalization and privatization of key industries deepened rural poverty and weakened labor protections. In South Korea, IMF-mandated reforms forced corporations to downsize massively, triggering protests and labor strikes. In Central Asia, IMF-WB-supported programs in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have pressured governments to implement structural reforms that disproportionately affect small-scale farmers and local industries. In the Pacific, IMF-WB programs have tied funding to privatization and fiscal austerity, often undermining social services and local development priorities.

Recent interventions continue to draw criticism. In Bangladesh, a 4.7 billion USD IMF loan program since 2023 carries strict conditionalities that have delayed disbursement and limited investment in infrastructure, health, and education. Several World Bank-funded projects totaling over 3 billion USD remain stalled due to bureaucratic and implementation bottlenecks, leaving communities without adequate sanitation, flood control, and social services. In Pakistan, IMF-backed bailout programs impose austerity measures, including subsidy cuts and higher taxes, disproportionately affecting low-income populations while emphasizing fiscal discipline over social welfare.

In addition to the long-standing Washington-led IFIs, China has established its own institutions to shape regional and global development finance. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), headquartered in Beijing, finances infrastructure, energy, transport, and water projects across Asia and beyond, with China holding about 26% of the voting share. Many AIIB projects align with China's Belt and Road Initiative, channeling Chinese capital, engineering services, and state-owned firms into partner countries.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has invested heavily in Central Asia, focusing on transport, energy, logistics, and industrial development. Key projects include the Khorgos Gateway dry port in Kazakhstan, which links the rail network of China and Kazakhstan; the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline, transporting Turkmen, Uzbek, and Kazakh gas to China; and the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway, designed to shorten transit routes to Europe. BRI investments also extend to industrial and manufacturing projects, such as the Pengsheng Industrial Park and electric-vehicle cluster in Uzbekistan. While these projects enhance regional connectivity and economic integration, they increase dependence on China's capital, technology, and trade corridors, raising concerns about structural economic and political leverage in the region.

The New Development Bank (NDB), created by BRICS countries and headquartered in Shanghai, supports infrastructure and sustainable development in emerging markets. While presented as an alternative to Western IFIs, China's influence in capital, governance, and strategic direction is significant. Both AIIB and NDB replicate patterns of large loans, debt exposure, and donor-driven development priorities, making borrowing countries financially dependent and often leaving social, labor and environmental concerns secondary to China's strategic and economic interests.

These examples illustrate how IMF-WB, and other IFIs prioritize debt repayment, corporate profits, and integration into global markets, often at the expense of equitable development for the most vulnerable populations. Trade blocs such as APEC, RCEP, and CPTPP reinforce this dynamic by promoting liberalization, market access, and foreign investment that disproportionately benefit advanced industrial economies and multinational corporations, while underdeveloped countries struggle to compete or capture gains. The social and economic pressures created by these policies—ranging from austerity measures and privatization to labor displacement and informalization—have fueled protests, labor strikes,

and grassroots resistance across the Asia-Pacific. These patterns expose IFIs and trade blocs as instruments of financial and economic domination rather than agents of genuine development, profiting from the destitution of the people, eroding national sovereignty, plundering natural resources, and subjugating development to corporate interests.

## **US Imperialism, Wars of Aggression, and People's Resistance in the Asia Pacific**

The world today faces escalating wars, militarization, and interventions that devastate lives, with the US at the center of conflicts across the Asia Pacific. US imperialism projects power through nearly 800 overseas bases, alliances like NATO, QUAD, AUKUS, and economic frameworks such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). China, through the BRI, SCO, RCEP, and BRICS, similarly extends its economic, political, and military influence, while territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the West Philippine Sea, Taiwan, and the Korean Peninsula heighten the risk of conflict. The US continues to exploit these regional disputes and positions the Philippines as a strategic outpost under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement – all part of a broader strategy of confrontation with China. US military campaigns have impacted countries including China, Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, Pakistan, and much of West Asia. In Palestine alone, over 65,000 people have died, most of them women and children. The devastation amounts to ecocide compounded by famine deliberately used as a weapon of war. In Lebanon, Zionist Israel has targeted both civilian communities and key resistance leaders, while Syria has endured more than a decade of crippling sanctions designed to suffocate its economy and prevent self-sufficiency. US imperialism continues to exploit oil resources. Yemen has suffered sustained bombing campaigns, and tensions with Iran have escalated. Across West Asia, the Axis of Resistance – comprising Palestine, Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran acts as a counterweight to US-Israel expansionism, even as proxy wars extend beyond the region.

Since the US “Pivot to Asia” in 2012, militarization in the region has accelerated. The Island Chain strategy has effectively reduced countries to pawns in potential conflicts with China, with bases, missile systems, and troops positioned across strategic points. By 2024, US defense spending reached \$997 billion—37 percent of global military expenditure—funding advanced stealth aircraft, submarines, missile defenses, and long-range strike systems. Forward bases and rotational deployments from Darwin to Guam, Okinawa, and Diego Garcia extend US power projection, prompting neighboring states to raise their own defense budgets: Japan

to \$55.3 billion, South Korea to \$47.6 billion, Taiwan to \$16.5 billion, Australia to just under \$50 billion, Singapore to \$15 billion, India by 7 percent for US-origin aircraft and radar systems, Vietnam and Malaysia by 4 percent each, and the Philippines to \$4.65 billion. Though framed as deterrence, these expenditures ultimately reinforce US imperialist dominance.

Beyond conventional warfare, the US actively promotes counterinsurgency strategies to suppress national liberation movements and political dissent. In countries such as the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, West Papua, and Kashmir, these programs mobilize military forces alongside bureaucracies, civil society, and private-sector actors. Measures include red-tagging, terrorist listings, illegal arrests, extrajudicial killings, aerial bombings, and forced relocations. These mechanisms are often reinforced through anti-terror and financial laws shaped by institutions such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). These policies erode civil liberties, stifle political opposition, and strengthen US-aligned regimes.

In the Global South, where systemic crises of overproduction persist, US imperialism installs compliant local elites to enforce its policies, often through fascistic measures. State violence rooted in anti-communism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, and religious manipulation suppresses resistance and political rivals. Interventions are justified as battles against “terrorists” or “communists,” but their true aim is resource extraction, subjugation, and the maintenance of global hegemony.

The competition for global dominance drives escalating militarization, economic sanctions, and proxy wars, with devastating consequences for ordinary people. As inter-imperialist contradictions intensify, the masses bear the compounded burdens of war, economic instability, and social unrest. Yet these crises also create conditions for resistance. Discontent with governments that prioritize war over public welfare is growing. Communities, organizations, and movements are increasingly vocal in demanding a just system that prioritizes people’s needs over profit and conflict.

Resistance persists across the Asia Pacific. In the Philippines, communities continue to challenge military operations and counterinsurgency campaigns, exposing human rights violations and demanding justice. In Burma, the liberation movement fights the military dictatorship and foreign interference to reclaim democracy and protect civilians. In Palestine,

steadfast resistance endures despite decades of US-backed occupation and violence. Across Northeast and Southeast Asia, citizens oppose militarization, foreign encroachment, and arms deployments, calling for governments to prioritize peace and human welfare. In West Papua, indigenous communities defend their land, culture, and resources against exploitation and occupation.

US imperialism depends on economic, financial, and military dominance to suppress national independence and sustain a decaying capitalist system that destroys rather than advances productive forces. Exposing these structural inequalities and advocating alternatives rooted in sovereignty, justice, and liberation is urgent. Only through organized, united action can people worldwide challenge militarization, imperialism, and systemic oppression, building a path toward a more just and peaceful world.