

Solidarity with Okinawa and Removal of Foreign Military Bases

Joseph Gerson, World Conference against A- & H- Bombs– August 5, 2021

I want to thank Gensuikyo for the opportunity to join Senaga-san, Lisa, and Choi Sung-Hee in this uniquely important workshop. I have the greatest respect and appreciation for their anti-bases freedom and peace movements.

I initially met Okinawan and Guam anti-base movement leaders when I came to Japan for the 1984 World Conference. I was shocked to learn that the U.S. still had more than 100 military bases and installations across Japan, with nearly three-quarters concentrated in Okinawa. I was pained and angered to learn how the U.S. bases serve U.S. war making and how people suffer from the military accidents, crimes, prostitution and sexual violence, environmental degradation, low altitude and night landing flights, live-fire exercises, and the political corruptions that are inherent to foreign military bases.

Representatives of the Guam Landowners Association brought two maps to that conference. One showed where Guam's best drinking and fishing waters and its best farmlands were. The other was a map of the U.S. bases. The maps were nearly identical, hammering home the displacements and injustice of the U.S. conquest and military colonization of the Chamorro people.

Before turning to the imperial contexts of the Biden Administration's campaign to build on the history of unequal treaties and alliances to diversify, upgrade and expand the bases of U.S. Indo-Pacific military domination, I want to share a few experiences that have marked me.

Once I was taken to a 500-year-old Okinawan compound where elite figures of the Ryokan Kingdom era hosted Chinese officials during the time of the Chinese tributary empire. The compound and its impressive technology designed to defend against

typhoons reflected a very advanced culture. That experience communicated depths of historical and cultural identity that are roots of the Okinawan freedom struggle.

Earlier, I learned how Okinawa was sacrificed at the end of the Pacific War to buy time for the Emperor system, and I was taken to an oceanside cliff where the Japanese military forced Okinawan student nurses commit mass suicide by leaping to their deaths.

Once, with Cora Fabros, I had the emotionally challenging responsibility of personally expressing sympathy to a family who had recently lost their mother and sister to one of the many accidents by drunken G.I's. Nothing we could say could ease their pain.

Over the years, Suzuyo Takazato and others have recounted the terrible decades-long history of U.S. military sexual harassment and violence, including against young children. They also taught me about systematized military prostitution, which I have also see in Olongapo in the Philippines and in camp towns near U.S. bases in South Korea.

At Kadena, you can see nuclear weapons bunkers, and I've learned that in the 1960s nuclear weapons were stored at Henoko. The secret 1972 agreement permitting the U.S. to bring nuclear weapons into Japan despite the Peace Constitution and the Three Non- Nuclear Principles is apparently still in effect. And I have the memory of flying home from Seoul, next to a U.S. lieutenant, who told me that his responsibility had been to launch a tactical nuclear weapon in the event of a renewed Korean War.

I've returned several times to a Ginowan rooftop to look out at Futenma's expanse and warplanes. No progress has been made to fulfill the 25-year-old agreement to shut down "the world's most dangerous airbase". When visiting veteran activists at their encampment at Oura Bay and demonstrators outside the Henoko base gates, I

have been saddened that they still must be out there, but truly inspired by their steadfast commitments.

Friends, U.S.-Chinese relations are at their nadir. We are witnessing the restructuring of the global disorder into a new, dangerous, and totally unnecessary confrontation analogous to the Cold War. At root are the inevitable tensions between rising and declining powers that in the past have climaxed in catastrophic wars. And like the years before WWI, there are also complex alliance structures, intense nationalism with its hatreds, territorial disputes, arms races with new technologies, international economic integration and competition, autocracies, and wild-card actors. An incident, accident, or miscalculation could escalate to a major, potentially nuclear, war.

Consistent with Trump's National Defense Strategy, the Biden Administration issued its Interim Strategic Guidelines which prioritize preparations for possible great power war against China or Russia. The Administration's "get tough" approach to China was previewed in the confrontational run up to the Anchorage mini summit. June's NATO summit adoption of its 2030 doctrine, makes containment of China one of the alliances two priorities.

One change from the Trump era is Biden's commitment to military alliances. Prime Minister Suga and President Moon were the first foreign heads of state invited by Biden to Washington. Secretaries Blinken and Austin met with their QUAD alliance partners before confronting their Chinese counterparts in Anchorage. Biden has reaffirmed the U.S. "ironclad" commitment to its alliance with South Korea, its military backing to Japan's Senkaku/Diaoyu Island claims, and to the military defense of Philippine interests in the South China/West Philippine Sea. And, with China's increasing area denial capabilities, the Pentagon is in the process of

diversifying the locations of its military bases, looking to build more and smaller bases to complicate Chinese targeting.

Taiwan is the world's most dangerous flashpoint. Neither side wants war, but accidents and miscalculations happen. U.S. support for the island's liberal democracy is a major source of tension with China, but two geostrategic realities lie at the heart of great power tensions over the island. Taiwan is just 100 miles from the Chinese mainland, making the island a source of China's military vulnerability. Taiwan is also the world's leading source of advanced semiconductors needed by the U.S., Chinese, Japanese and South Korean economies. The island is thus a coveted strategic prize.

China has been clear about its red line for what it calls its 'renegade province', Beijing warns that if Taipei takes irreversible steps toward de jure independence, it will respond militarily.

The U.S. is playing with fire. Biden has repeatedly dispatched warships to the Taiwan Strait, and there are plans to permanently deploy U.S. warships near Taiwan. Blinken and Austin have trumpeted Washington's "rock solid" commitment to Taiwan's defense, which is reinforced by U.S. bases across Japan. And now the Suga government has declared its intention to intervene militarily in a war over Taiwan.

China is no innocent. The PLA welcomed Biden by repeatedly sending warplanes into Taiwan's air space and warships into Taiwanese waters. And Xi Jinping marked the CCP's 100th anniversary by stressing that reunification with Taiwan is a principle of China's "national rejuvenation"

The situation is no better in the South China/West Philippine Sea. Encircled by U.S. military bases and installations and the 7th Fleet, in total disregard of other nations' legitimate claims and of international law, China has expanded its Southern defense perimeter with its neo-imperial nine-dash line and construction of military bases on disputed rocks and islets. The Sea holds the world's fourth largest oil

reserve. Of greater strategic importance, it lies astride sea lanes over which 40% of the world's trade transits, including fossil fuels that power the Chinese, Japanese and South Korean economies. Were its sea lanes to be blockaded, the region's economies would face disaster. The Sea is thus the jugular vein of global capitalism and the geopolitical center of the struggle for world power.

This explains the provocative and dangerous U.S., Chinese, Japanese, British, French, German, and Dutch naval shows of force in the Sea that could too easily result in an incident and escalate to a major, potentially nuclear, war.

Our governments should be pursuing mutually beneficial common security diplomacy that can eliminate the existential threats of nuclear weapons, the climate emergency, and pandemics, as well as the conflict over the uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu rocks.

The so-called "rules-based order" - the imperial system imposed by the U.S. and its allies in the aftermath of World War II – which the U.S. and its allies selectively enforce, includes the oppressive and dangerous U.S. global network of foreign military bases. In shows of force and to prepare for catastrophic wars, the U.S., its allies, and China are engaged in provocative military operations in the South China/West Philippine Sea and near Taiwan where accidents or miscalculations could trigger a military conflict and escalation to nuclear war. This helps to explain why the U.S. is so committed to building the Henoko base, why there are plans to deploy first-strike related missile defenses in Okinawa, expanding its bases in Guam, deepening its alliance with Seoul, and extending the Visiting Forces Agreement with Duterte.

Our response must be clear: No new bases. Withdraw all U.S. foreign military bases. Abolish nuclear weapons. Reverse climate change. Stanch pandemics. And build the future that promises us all peace, justice, and security. ///