Towards Dialogue And Negotiations: Conflicting Narratives And The UN's Potential Role In Ending The War In Ukraine

Heikki Patomaki – Photo: University of Helsinki

11-25-2024 ~ *The war in Ukraine appears to be nearing its end. It is time to start considering what the peace process could look like.*

Introduction

Military solutions received the most attention in Europe and the US during the first two and a half years following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In late 2024, the situation has started to change. In the West and Ukraine, peace negotiations are now discussed more widely. What a lasting peace between Ukraine and Russia would look like and how could it be achieved? For example, after the June 2024 "Ukraine Peace Conference" (held in Bürgenstock Resort in Switzerland on 15–16 June 2024), both the Swiss organisers and President Zelensky have said that Russia should be involved in the next phase of the Conference. In September 2024, Zelensky explained that Ukraine's attack on Russian territory was pre-emptive and part of his plan to force Russia to negotiate. President Putin has in turn said he would be willing to revive negotiations on terms

first discussed at talks in Istanbul at the start of the full-scale invasion.

The shift also reflects changes in the domestic politics of various countries. According to many reports, there is deep war weariness in Ukraine and the tension between stated goals (winning the war) and actual situation and actions (willingness to sacrifice for a common cause) is becoming sharper. Although Russia's economic situation has remained relatively good despite the war and sanctions – and probably [also because of them](#) – the long-lasting war of attrition is eroding the legitimation basis of Putin's regime. In Western countries, right-wing populism favours peace negotiations, and it is difficult for conventional parties not to react to their proposals. In the US, President-elect Donald Trump has promised to negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war. In Germany, as a response to the rise of the nationalist-populist Alternative for Germany (AFD) and the more left-leaning party of Sahra Wagenknecht, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said it is time to rekindle diplomatic efforts to end the war in Ukraine. Moreover, from a global perspective, it is clear that the vast majority of humanity is either ambivalent about the war or inclined to adopt a Western-critical attitude towards it and background factors such as the expansion of NATO. Russia is a key member of the expanding and evolving BRICS coalition, which is increasingly partaking in articulating the voice of the global south.

Despite signs that the willingness of the parties to negotiate is increasing, the war continues and, simultaneously, the tendencies toward further escalation remain strong as witnessed by the decision of President Biden to allow Ukraine to strike Russia with long-range US missiles and British Prime Minister Starmer to do the same with UK Storm Shadow missiles. Increasingly daring strikes and attacks on Russian territory, on the one hand, and threats of retaliatory strikes or other escalatory measures, on the other, mean that the war could expand further, possibly even into a nuclear war. And despite expressions of willingness to negotiate, many key Western actors continue to bolster their commitment to exclusively military solutions. A case in point is the European Parliament which in September 2024 called for lifting restrictions on the use of Western weapons and strengthening sanctions against Russia while neglecting diplomatic paths to end the war. Moreover, NATO is considering concrete steps toward Ukraine's membership even while the war is waging on. Meanwhile, in Russia, there is a vocal group both inside and outside the Putin administration demanding increasingly drastic measures to resolve the war in Russia's favour.

Under these circumstances, de-escalation requires creative solutions, indicating the need to problematise and reframe the prevailing stories, to find room for negotiations where issues can be discussed, debated, and agreed upon. This requires reframing and reimagining goals. Also, new ideas regarding institutional arrangements are needed. In this piece, I first discuss the possibility of telling better stories about the conflict and its possible solutions; and then consider institutional solutions that could enable overcoming the currently prevailing zero-sum logic. I propose an international transitional administration (ITA) in Eastern Ukraine led by the UN. ITA refers to the temporary responsibility for providing the principal governance or functions of government by an inter- or supranational organisation. The UN has many historical experiences of such arrangements, applicable to the situation in Ukraine. The UN experience has not been used to consider ways of ending the Ukraine-Russia war, but priorities may now be changing, as peace negotiations can be expected to resume in early 2025, even if this remains contingent on various developments.

Narratives about the war in Ukraine

In any conflict, the prevailing narratives in conflicts tend to be selective, biased, and simplistic. Narratives are also interactive and dynamic, i.e. they evolve during the conflict. Narratives can be functional from the point of view of the unity of the political community as well as intertwined with established interests, or with interests that have developed as a result of a conflict. Apart from the actions of the other – framed and interpreted in terms of the ego's dominant narrative – a variety of social mechanisms can maintain and reinforce particular narratives within the parties of the conflict, and these mechanisms can involve anything from encouragement and reward to public shaming and punishment and censorship. Although each conflict is historically specific, types of narratives are common and appear across many different conflicts. The war in Ukraine is no exception to the rule.

In the West, there are two different competing narratives about the war in Ukraine that started in 2014 and expanded into a full-scale invasion in 2022. Leaving aside the deep-seated continuities, the role of background theories, and manifold contingent historical developments, the (still) prevailing Western narrative can be summarised as a struggle between the "bad guys" and "good guys". Russia led by dictator Putin represents imperialism and is alone responsible for this unprovoked war which violates international law, whereas Ukraine represents freedom and

democracy as well as courage and heroism. The prevailing Western framing also involves the idea that countries are and must be free to join NATO or any military alliance if they so wish. The forces of evil must be won decisively, so NATO should be strengthened further. The likelihood of conflict escalation is played down as it would lessen the resolve to reach a total victory.

To the extent that the Ukraine war is seen through moral prescriptions, as a struggle between good and evil, tendencies toward further escalating the war are strong. This framing generates a curious mixture of liberal idealism and power politics. It is (neo)liberal and universalising in the sense that it assumes the superiority of "our side" in every confrontation, justifying moralising interventionism, while it is also based on an asymmetrical cynicism and militarism: the evil others only understand the language of force. In this black-and-white, moralistic framework, it is not surprising that only a few peace proposals have been presented and that actors tend to resort to increasingly harsh military measures, stricter sanctions, and further escalation of conflict. Militarists have become the oracles of the future and politicians and diplomats their servants. From the narrative-analysis viewpoint, what is of particular concern is that this narrative involves the negation of the narrative of the other party in the conflict; anything associated with the other's narrative can then be labelled as propaganda or misinformation.

The main Russian narrative provides a sharply contrastive view of locating the good and the evil. Attempts in the 1990s to seek Russian identity and place in the post-Cold War (neo)liberal world order were complicated and disturbed by developments such as the rapid concentration of wealth, major socio-economic difficulties, widespread crime and murder (another indicator of insecurity of everyday life), partial state collapse, and a sense of humiliation. As the West-recommended reforms failed, all political forces in Russia started to stress the importance of *samobytnost'* or the national distinctiveness of Russia. The counter-hegemonic framing and story emerged already in the 1990s but evolved further and started to shape developments in the 2000s.

During the extended Putin–Medvedev era, "the new Russia" of Boris Yeltsin has gradually been replaced by a discourse stressing long-term continuities in Russian history. This discourse has redefined the identity and aspirations of Russia. A turning point was the 2007 Munich speech, where Putin warned against NATO's eastward expansion and that the unchecked US dominance would lead to an arms

race. Particularly since the turning points of the 2000s and early 2010s, the "nationally distinct" identity has included elements such as competitive victimhood (i.e., the belief that one's own nation has suffered more than the others); distinction between the decadent values of the postmodern West and the more authentic and traditional values of Russia; belief in the importance of a developmental state for economic stability and growth; the idea that a full recognition as an equal (great power) requires economic and military power; securitisation of Western attempts to interfere in the domestic politics of the former Soviet states and especially Russia itself; concerns about EU and NATO expansion; and last but not least, criticism of Western exclusionary practices and double standards. All this is consistent with a global vision of cultural and political pluralism in a multipolar international system, sometimes associated with claims for more democratic decision-making, sometimes with power balancing.

This sense-making narrative is not only itself historical (for example, during the 2013-14 events in Ukraine, the geopolitical othering of the EU and the West became stronger and the majority of Russians turned against the EU and the West. It also concerns world history and involves narratives about Russia's place in the wider scheme of things. While various beginnings and conflicts appear important for mainstream Russian stories, since the 2000s, it is the great patriotic war (WWII) that has shaped most of them. Given the dominance of the prevailing framings and narratives, it is easy to understand how, from this point of view, the expansion of the EU and NATO and related episodes such as the Euromaidan have appeared as threatening to Russia's distinctive identity and security. Under these circumstances, the expanding West (both the EU and NATO) has increasingly, especially since 2013-14, assumed the role of a potential or actual enemy. Also in Russia, anything associated with the enemy's narrative can then be labelled as propaganda or misinformation. Moreover, in Russia, the increasingly autocratic state (though in its own official documents Russia continues to be defined as a democratic country) has tended to forcefully prevent the presentation of dissenting views, especially so in times of war.

The conflict is not just between the West and Russia. There has been a low-intensity war in Eastern Ukraine since 2014. In February 2022, Russia started a full-scale invasion. The question of Ukraine's identity and agency complicates the picture, as does the suffering of the Ukrainian people. The main "competition" about victimhood is thus between Russia and Ukraine. Since the collapse of the

Soviet Union, Ukraine's identity has been the subject of ongoing disputes, which have involved the entanglement of historical narratives about Ukraine with the relations between the West, Europe and Russia and their definitions. Until 2014, perhaps a third of the Ukrainian population identified Russian as their native tongue (the Bolsheviks transferred large parts of Russian territory into Ukraine); moreover, a majority of citizens used Ukrainian and Russian interchangeably in different contexts. The economy of the Eastern part of Ukraine remained entangled with Russia, whereas the Western part was increasingly geared towards the EU. Economic and cultural orientations changed in 2014-22. Especially since February 2022, Russian has become associated with the aggressor, leading many Ukrainians to adopt Ukrainian more fervently, even in areas where Russian was traditionally spoken.

Following the failed negotiations of March-April 2022, and half a year after the start of the full-scale war, Russia annexed four regions of eastern Ukraine, which, it seems, have been forcefully Russianised, though interpretations vary. Meanwhile, also as a consequence of the war, ethnic nationalism prevails in the rest of Ukraine (pro-Russian and leftist political parties are banned, etc.). The project of ethnic nationalism is thereby aligned with the EU and NATO definitions of democracy and human rights (and civilisation). This is enabled by the shared commitment to the idea of Ukrainian victimhood. Also, the dominant Ukrainian narrative has included the goal of "winning the war" against Russia. This narrative too has been reinforced through autocratic mechanisms, though it may now be changing.

The problem of revising the prevailing narratives

Contrasting narratives interact. Given a negative spiral, the further the mutual collapse of trust among states (or their coalitions) goes, the more each side begins to believe that the other's behaviour can be modified by force and deterrence only. Even under the circumstances, there has been a minority view in the West arguing that reality is more complicated than what the majority suggests. In this view, the unfortunate and shortsighted Russian invasion violates international law and has caused an enormous amount of suffering in Ukraine and turmoil, for the warring states, Europe, the US, and the world, but this invasion was not unprovoked. While there are different ways of articulating the specifics of the narrative, this storyline involves the idea that also the West and the US in particular bear partial responsibility for the tragic outcome of the long process of mutual alienation and escalation of conflict between Russia and the West. Moreover, the minority view

includes many alarmists who warn that the escalation has already continued or can continue to a point where the world is verging on nuclear war.

Although in the mid-2020s Russia, an explicit foreign policy opposition is largely suppressed and excluded from the public sphere, Russia remains a neo-revisionist power, criticising unipolarity and the one-sidedness of the rules ("who makes them?") and their application in the current system rather than trying to drastically change those rules. The fact that Russia is committed to many of the existing rules – including via BRICS – and uses the inherent contradictions of the prevailing "liberal world order" opens possibilities for dialogue and an eventual overcoming of the war. Russia's challenge to the US hegemony is in part based on the idea that Russia has the right to act like the West has always acted (i.e. it reserves the right to ignore rules that do not fit its priorities). This is an explicit and contested idea, but many background assumptions are considered self-evident – and may not even be noticed – by the actors. Even when A and B struggle violently against each other, they can share a number of the same, similar, or analogical background assumptions, some but not all of which may be conducive to dialogue. Resolving conflicts requires the possibility of changing understandings, rules, and practices. Adjustments to the rules or their application presuppose the revisionist's or challenger's reciprocal readiness to shoulder responsibility for the reformed order. A scenario is that a reformed global system creates a conducive context for Russian internal reforms, which in turn feeds Russian support for the system.

A mutual dialogue presupposes some readiness and willingness to revise, at least to a degree, the prevailing conflict narratives on each side. The problem of transforming violence into politics and diplomacy faces many obstacles, however. In open systems, attempts at a dialogue may fail due to the factors intrinsic or extrinsic to the dynamics of negotiations themselves. Both entrenched interests and the drive for community unity (also for the sake of winning the conflict) can sustain – together with the various homogenising mechanisms – the prevailing stories. The effects of the revisions of the narrative depend on the context. There is for example evidence that although a more inclusive narrative about suffering tends to reduce the support for aggressive policies toward the other, a concern about outside support (some trusted third party or a grouping of states and organisations) may reverse this connection. The other side of the coin is that the relevant third party can thereby be in a position to shape responses to the revision of narratives (Ukraine is not only dependent on the support from the West, but also

the role of less involved outsiders such as Brazil, China, and Turkey can be important). Moreover, the peace interest does not lie in the attempt to overcome all contradictions or causes of conflicts, but rather in handling the transformation from violence to politics and diplomacy in a sufficiently acceptable and sustainable way. This requires a degree of de-polarisation and de-escalation of the conflict and thus at least some adjustments of the prevailing narratives, often in terms of reframing or reimagining goals.

Reframing and reimagining the goals: the potential role of the United Nations

Given the prevailing narratives and the fight over territories in Ukraine, it is thus not surprising that in 2024-25 the conflict in Ukraine tends to be framed in zero-sum terms. In the March-April 2022 negotiations, Russia would have been satisfied with the situation that existed before the February invasion assuming Ukraine's commitment to neutrality and disarmament and some other conditions such as ensuring the status of the Russian language inside Ukraine, but after Ukraine ended negotiations under pressure from the Western leaders, NATO, and domestic opinion, Russia decided to annex the four oblasts in clear violation of international law. In 2024, Russia regards the newly annexed oblasts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, in addition to Donetsk and Luhansk within their administrative borders, as part of its territories, while Ukraine and the West regard the internationally recognised borders of 1992 as valid. The diametrically opposed perceptions of the other party's actions and justice appear to mean that the territorially defined zero-sum situation can only be rectified through military force. In this kind of context, the transformation from violence to politics and diplomacy could be achieved by partially de-territorialising the conflict.

Russia's view of international cooperation has traditionally relied on the UN system, where it has a special status as a permanent member of the Security Council. Also Ukraine, the EU, NATO and the US are committed to the principles of the UN. Commitment to rules and principles does not mean that they are always followed or that they are interpreted impartially and consistently, but they can nevertheless provide, in principle, a basis for dialogue, some kind of cooperation, and a possible agreement. Also, dialogue and negotiations about the situation in Ukraine may be helped by modifying the wider context to be a degree less threatening and cooperative. Consider for example the possibility that NATO starts to plan and prepare for the withdrawal of all US nuclear warheads from Europe and Turkey prior to negotiations. The actual withdrawal would be carried out once

peace terms were agreed between Ukraine and Russia. In the situation of 2024, this proposal could also include a tentative promise to refrain from placing new American military bases in the Nordic countries (partly right next to the Russian border, where the permanent military presence of the US and NATO especially on Finnish territory constitutes from a Russian viewpoint [a threat to Russia's national security](#) – in line with the standard security dilemma).

These kinds of moves would not weaken NATO militarily but could get Russia's attention and might facilitate dialogue and the ensuing negotiations. In the literature, such a strategy is called "altercasting". The point is to persuade the other (alter) by casting/positioning them in a new way in relation to oneself. The idea is to propose a new relationship so that the other will be inclined to act in that new role, in this case involving a move from the logic of deterrence to a more cooperative orientation. This is what Michail Gorbachev did with regard to Ronald Reagan in the mid-1980s. Any reciprocal action on such an initiative from the Russian side could restore confidence to the point where dialogue and negotiations may be recommenced.

The war in Ukraine concerns peace and security in the world as a whole, and the UN was built to tackle such problems. The mutual conflict between the members of the Security Council prevents the effective functioning of the UN, but that does not mean that the UN cannot have other ways to intervene in the course of events. For example, in the current situation involving the risk of nuclear escalation, the UN Secretary-General could resort to a rarely used leadership measure the founders of the UN Charter endowed to him: the use of Article 99 of the Charter. The Article says that the Secretary-General can "bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security". It is difficult to imagine a more urgent and appropriate use of Article 99 than the increased risk of nuclear war in Ukraine. Secretary-General Antonia Guterres has warned about the risks of escalation and nuclear war several times. Even if the Security Council turns out to be unable to act despite the warnings and Article 99, the UN General Assembly could also take the initiative. Many peace processes also require third parties to act as mediators. Third-party facilitators and mediators should come primarily from countries that are seen as being sufficiently outside of the conflict by both parties (for example, Indonesia or Thailand) and they could include representatives from institutions such as the International Court of Justice or the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Also, various

ad hoc contact groups and attempts at Track 2 diplomacy could be helpful.

My proposal ([first made with Tapio Kanninen](#)) is that the UN could play an important role in de-escalating the conflict through deterritorialising, at least to a degree, the conflict in Ukraine. The process would involve also reframing and reimagining the goals of the parties. This idea is built on both current initiatives and historical UN experiences. For example, on 11 November 2022, the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability issued a [Call for Armistice in Ukraine](#), signed by five former heads of State of Government. The initiative asks for a transition from a general cease-fire to a final peace settlement between Russia and Ukraine which is to be supervised by the UN and possibly other international organizations. Demilitarisation of the occupied areas and a larger demilitarised zone between the armed forces of the belligerents could be a part of an agreement. The plan also calls for immediate efforts to repair civilian infrastructure, including in the areas to be placed under temporary international administration, and to secure an adequate supply of food, water, health care and energy for the inhabitants. A somewhat similar proposal was made by Indonesia in June 2023. Indonesia's then defence minister Prabowo Subianto, now President of Indonesia, proposed establishing a demilitarised zone by withdrawing 15 kilometres from each party's forward position, observed and monitored by a peacekeeping force deployed by the UN. This could be a step toward a wider UN involvement.

The proposal is not only to establish a demilitarized zone like in Korea. The concepts of demilitarized zone and UN-managed territory could cover all the main areas contested in the war. Their long-term status could be specified later in diplomatic and democratic terms, following the principles of dialogue, cooperation, and the rule of law. An international transitional administration (ITA) in Eastern Ukraine could assume temporary responsibility for providing the principal governance or functions of government. The aim is to facilitate a future resolution and provide functions of government during the transitional period. ITAs are sometimes introduced to act as neutral arbitrators and mediators, ensuring that no particular ethnic group dominates the political process while the region transitions to a peaceful settlement. Important historical precedent cases include the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) (1992–1993), United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) (1999–2002), and various similar authorities and administrations that were established in the former

Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

ITAs typically serve one of two purposes: they can manage conflicting sovereignty claims leading to a future resolution, or they can provide legitimate governance where there is none or is lacking for some reason. The legitimacy of ITA is of course anything but automatic and must be demonstrated in practice through clear processes and context-sensitive management requiring sufficient resources. What is important here is that the option of using the UN's presence in Ukraine is an already much-tested model for the de-escalation of war and building elements for peace. Instead of seeing the conflict as a mythic struggle between good and evil, what is needed is a sense of nuance, context and reciprocal process. The reliance on common institutions and especially the potential of the UN presence on the ground as a tool for de-escalation would be a step in this direction. Negotiations are always possible if there is a political will to engage in them.

The idea is that following a period of necessary back-channel diplomacy and negotiations, the UN Security Council could declare or the parties could directly negotiate a binding ceasefire, with the deployment of a peacekeeping force and other UN personnel. The areas of Ukraine occupied by Russian forces would become demilitarised and governed temporarily by the UN, with some flexibility in specifying the territories and their boundaries. The example of East Timor is instructive, although there are also significant differences between the cases and required processes. The tasks in East Timor included maintaining security and order, providing relief assistance, assisting in rebuilding physical infrastructure, administering the territory based on the rule of law, and assisting in the drafting of a new constitution and conducting elections. A key problem in East Timor was that locals often felt that they had no say in decision-making even during the ITA . The problem was solved with the transfer of power to the locals, but in eastern Ukraine, this issue is more complex, due to changes in the composition of the population (including those changes that have already occurred and those that will occur after the situation has become stabilised under the rubric of the UN) and a longer transition period.

Compared to East Timor, in Ukraine, a longer period of transition may be required, possibly as long as 10 to 20 years. Eastern Ukraine is also a large land area and would require large peacekeeping and other resources and administrative personnel. "The UN Transitional Administration of Eastern Ukraine" would also have the task of assisting in negotiating and drafting a new legal basis for the

status of these regions and conducting regular elections, as well as a possible referendum in the future. Ukraine's military non-alignment remains a key issue and must be part of negotiations.

The reframing and definition of goals and objectives cannot, of course, be limited only to those questions that concern disputed territories and competing sovereignty claims in Ukraine especially in Eastern Ukraine. The war is a consequence of decades of conflict escalation between Russia and the West, and in world politics and global political economy more generally. The construction and reproduction of the dominant narrative on each side concern interpretations of history as well as many theoretical, methodological, conceptual, and normative choices. Many social mechanisms powerfully maintain the prevalence of particular narratives. When a certain narrative is taken as the starting point for thinking and action, any deviation from it is easily seen as untruth or even as conscious lying (disinformation, propaganda). The central task of common global institutions is to provide a space where different narratives and frames of reference can meet peacefully and be reassessed through dialogue, debate, and compromise. The UN may be in many ways anachronistic, yet it remains the main institutional framework for reframing and reimagining possibilities.

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Canada Reinvents The Xenophobic Wheel

Saurav Sarkar - sauravsarkar.com

11-22-2024 ~ Bikram Singh is running out of time on his post-study work visa in Canada.

Singh is one of about [70,000](#) migrants who were sold on the Canadian dream of eventually making the country their home but now face an uncertain future with their work permits set to expire by December 2024. They came from places like India, China, and the Philippines, and sold their land and belongings in their home countries, took out loans, or made other enormous commitments to get themselves to Canada.

"We came here for our future. They promise you an easy permanent residency here." However, due to the backlog of the Canadian immigration system, it has become more difficult to secure permanent residency now compared to in the past, he says.

"We are demanding a fair chance. Now they are saying, 'We never promised [permanent residency],'" Singh says.

Canada has a system of post-study visas for students who graduate from Canadian colleges and universities. This year, with an upcoming election in 2025, Canada's political parties are playing with the lives of migrants by tightening the country's immigration policies, resulting in their visas no longer being eligible for renewal—as they were during the COVID-19 pandemic. The parties have also been engaging in xenophobic campaign tactics.

Singh says, "All political parties are playing this dirty [blame] game," where immigrants are blamed for unemployment, housing crisis, and inflation. As a result, Canadian voters "don't know their real enemy. The ruling class of Canada diverts their anger," says Singh, from the "Canadian imperialist capitalist system."

More than 50 worker-activists with [Naujawan Support Network](#) (NSN) and the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) Committee have established a 24-hour outdoor encampment in Brampton, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto. As of November 19, 2024, they have been there rain or shine for more than 80 days.

They want their work visas extended for 2024 and 2025—more than [200,000](#) work permits. They are further [demanding](#) five-year work visas for all international students, a fair pathway to permanent residency, and an end to exploitation under Labor Market Impact Assessments (LMIAs).

LMIAs are documents that Canadian businesses must obtain to hire many categories of temporary workers. Through these documents, they show that no Canadian citizen or permanent resident was available for a particular job.

While this may sound harmless in theory, Singh says that, in practice, LMIAs are a way to generate money for businesses under the table while tying workers even more closely to a single employer. It's a recipe for exploitation and illegal, "but everyone knows that this is going on," says Singh.

LMIAs aren't the only way that Canadian institutions have made money off migrants. Singh says colleges and universities overenrolled during the COVID-19 pandemic to make money off students taking classes from home in sending countries.

In 2024, several protests have taken place in other provinces of Canada, like those in [Manitoba](#) and [Prince Edward Island](#), besides the NSN and PGWP Committee protest.

Canada's upcoming election is just the latest to be affected by xenophobia. In 2024, anti-immigrant politics have become prevalent across the globe, from [India to Tunisia to Donald Trump's U.S.](#), in a year replete with major elections.

As of 2020, there were about 281 million migrants around the world comprising [3.6 percent of the global population](#), according to the United Nations. Remittance flows, or money sent from migrants back to their home countries, amounted to $831 billion in 2022, a figure [bigger than the economies of many nations](#).

By Saurav Sarkar

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Source: Globetrotter

Cities Made Differently: Try Imagining Another Urban Existence
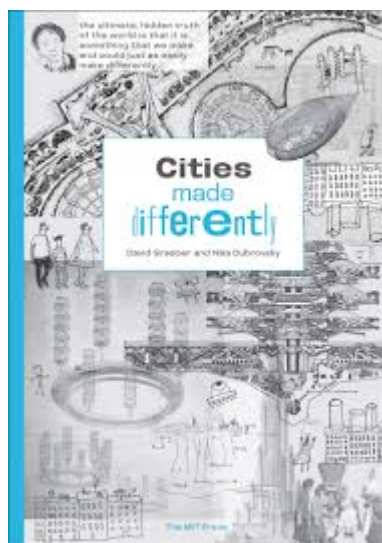
11-22-2024 ~ *We know from history that there are many ways we can live together—let's explore the idea.*

In thousands of ways, we are taught to accept the world we live in as the only possible one, but thousands of other ways of organizing homes, cities, schools, societies, economies, and cosmologies have existed and could exist.

We started a project called Made Differently: designed to play with the possibility and to overcome the suspicion—instilled in us every day—that life is limited, miserable, and boring.

Our first focus is [Cities Made Differently](#), exploring different ways of living together. Read and imagine four different kinds of cities taken from our book which are listed below, and continue your exploration, downloadable at

a4kids.org, for drawing and dreaming.

City of Greed
What if you had to live in a city whose citizens must pay not only for housing and health care but also for the air they breathe?

The dystopian novel *The Air Merchant* takes place in a secret underground factory city. Mr. Bailey, the factory owner, condenses air from the atmosphere and sells it to his fellow citizens for a profit. Eventually, the Earth's atmosphere thins, creating a catastrophic shortage of breathable air. With the price of air increasing, fewer and fewer humans can afford to keep breathing.

When people can't pay for the air they breathe, the police throw them out of the city. Everyone lives in constant fear of suffocating, thinking only of how to earn enough money to spare their loved ones and themselves that terrible fate. The food company Nestlé is often criticized for its irresponsible use of water in India, Pakistan, and other developing countries. Captured in the documentary film [*We Feed the World*](#) (2005), former Nestlé chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe said:

"It's a question of whether we should privatize the normal water supply for the population. And there are two different opinions on the matter… NGOs, who bang on about declaring water a public right… That's an extreme solution. The other view says that water is a foodstuff like any other, and like any other foodstuff, it should have a market value. Personally, I believe it's better to give a foodstuff a value so that we're all aware it has its price…"

City as a Family
Imagine a city without any strangers, where everything is shared, and everyone looks after each other. There are no shops, no money, and no danger at all.

We think of the family as a group that practices "basic communism": from each according to his ability to each according to his needs. Any family is thought to be protected by bonds of kinship from the cruel laws of the outside world. Unlike businesses, rarely will a family throw out a sick child or an elderly parent because they are no longer "revenue-generating assets."

According to Roman law, which still underlies the value system of Western societies, a family was all those people living within the household of a *paterfamilias* or father whose authority over them was recognized as absolute.

Under the protection of her father, a woman might be spared abuse from her husband, but their children, slaves, and other dependents were his to do with as he wanted.

According to early Roman law, a father was fully within his rights to whip, torture, or sell them. A father could even execute his children, provided that he found them to have committed capital crimes. With his slaves, he didn't even need that excuse.

The patriarchal family is also the model for authoritarianism. In ancient Rome, the patriarch had the right to treat his household members as property rather than as equal human beings.

The Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed that humankind originally lived in small bands of hunter-gatherers composed of close friends and relatives until big cities and agriculture emerged, and with them wars, greed, and exploitation.

However, archaeology shows us numerous examples of how people in different times and across different parts of the Earth lived in large metropolitan areas while managing their collective affairs on a fairly egalitarian basis. At the same time, there have always been small communities where status inequality prevailed and a privileged minority at the top benefited by exploiting the rest.

We know from our personal experience that in almost every family there are elements of both authoritarianism and baseline communism. This contradiction never fully goes away but different cultures handle it differently.

A City of Runners
The people who live in this city believe that real life is all about constant competition.

The people in a city of runners find it fascinating or even necessary to keep track of who among them is more important, who is richer, smarter, more beautiful, or more worthy. There are many ideas about how the city came to have habits like this.

One of the city's revered philosophers, Thomas Hobbes, believed that the natural state of human beings is to seek violent domination over their neighbors, and that

society without the authority of the sovereign would quickly turn into a battle of all against all. Constant competition between people is thus seen as an enjoyable game as compared to real war, which is always lurking around the corner.

Naturally, in cities like this, there must be some who are poor, ugly, and unhappy. Just as in some children's games, there are winners and losers.

People living in the city of runners foster an admiration for winning in their kids, and an ambition to surpass their peers in all areas. Children in the city of runners have no interest in learning together, sharing, or mutual aid. Helping someone pass an exam is considered "cheating" and is strictly punished. All their lives, adults are engaged in constant competition over beauty, skill, and wealth.

Runners believe that people who live differently from them and who refuse to play their games simply choose to be losers. During the 1968 student unrest in Western countries, some disaffected young people abandoned the big cities for the "sleepy" provinces where they created autonomous settlements, many of which still exist today.

Underground City
Living in an underground city could be safe and convenient. Without weather, there's no risk of storms. And no trees mean no forest fires.

Underground cities have been around practically forever. The city of Derinkuyu in the Turkish province of Cappadocia, for example, was built between 2000 and 1000 BCE. The landscape of volcanic tuff—a unique soft stone—could be hollowed out without requiring complex tools, making room to house 20,000 people. The underground city boasted a stable, corrals, churches, schools, canteens, bakeries, barns, wine cellars, and workshops. The intricate system of tunnels connecting it all together meant that intruders would not know their way around and quickly get lost.

Tunnels are found underneath many cities. Rome is famous for its catacombs, and at one time subterranean burial chambers were commonplace. These days, tunnels tend to be for underground trains called subways. In Beijing, the residents became so fearful of nuclear war that they built an entire bunker city, with 30 kilometers of tunnels connecting underground houses, schools, hospitals, shops, libraries, theaters, and factories. There's even an underground roller skating rink!

Mexico City has not gone as far as to build an entire city underground, but architect Esteban Suarez is planning an underground apartment building. And what a building it will be! Piercing the center of the Mexican capital with its tip will be a 65-story pyramid—no wonder they call it the earthscraper. The glass-enclosed area above the surface will be for recreation and outdoor concerts.

Underground, the building will be heated and powered with geothermal energy, making the pyramid energy self-sufficient. It's not easy building downward into the earth, but building underground won't disrupt the historical landscape of the city. And it evades the city's building codes restricting the height of structures to eight floors.

Mirny, a town in the Russian far north, has its eye on an abandoned diamond mine as the site for an underground city. There are no more diamonds to be found, but its abandonment threatens neighboring villages with cave-ins and landslides. Moscow architect Nikolai Lyutomsky has proposed a solution: building a strong concrete skeleton inside the quarry to strengthen its walls while covering its top with a transparent dome, resulting in an underground eco-city fit for 10,000 people.

Located in the Yakutia Republic, the town has a harsh arctic climate with temperatures reaching as low as -60 degrees Celsius in the winter. But underground, the temperature never falls below zero. The quarry would thus be good for both people and plants. Its architects have allocated most of the city's inner space to vertical farms. Farms for food production, technical laboratories, factories, and research centers are located underground and, aboveground, there will be play centers and schools. Moving between the underground and the surface is quick and easy.

Going underground to avoid possible misfortunes—might seem like a good idea, but there's a catch: if you don't like the rules of your community it's tough to get out. How important is it to be able to easily leave one community, whose rules no longer suit you, and join a different one?

By David Graeber and Nika Dubrovsky

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Source: MIT Press

COP29 Ignores Militarism, Putting Meaningful Climate Deal Out Of Reach

11-22-2024 ~ *Leaders of the world's top polluting nations skipped COP29, which also failed to address how militarism fuels emissions.*

The 2024 UN climate change conference, COP29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, is now nearing its end and reports are that talks are deadlocked. The two biggest elephants in the room are militarism and climate financing.

Wars generate more carbon emissions than many countries, while the [U.S. military](#) is the [single largest institutional source](#) of greenhouse gas emissions, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have resulted not only in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, but have caused catastrophic damage to the environment and paved the way to hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide (CO_2) into the atmosphere. For example, it's estimated that the first two years of Russia's war on Ukraine will have generated

[175 million metric tonnes](#) of carbon dioxide. This is more than the total emissions generated individually by many countries, including the Netherlands, Venezuela and Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Gaza's future habitability is very much in doubt. In just the first six weeks of the assault, Israel dropped a staggering 29,000 bombs on Gaza, with the majority of the bombs being [2,000 pounds](#) and supplied to Israel from the U.S. Emissions from just the first 120 days of Israel's war on Gaza (October 2023-February 2024) exceeded the annual emissions of 26 countries and territories, according to a [study](#) by an international team of researchers. When the war infrastructure (built primarily by Israel but also including that built by Hamas) is taken into account, the total emissions increase to more than 36 countries and territories, while the emissions associated with the rebuilding of Gaza are "projected to be higher than the annual emissions of over 135 countries," according to the same study.

COP29's failure to address militarism's contribution to climate change ensures any progress will be trivial. But let's look at another elephant in the room: coming to an agreement on climate finance, which is the main objective for the countries gathered at the climate summit. The annual $100 billion target established in 2009 to support developing countries in reducing emissions and adapting to the threats of global warming was met for the first time in 2022 — two years after the initial deadline. Moreover, that figure is now recognized by the [Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance](#) as highly insufficient. Developing countries need trillions of dollars to combat climate change and address its impacts. A few countries, such as [India](#) on behalf of like-minded developing countries and [Saudi Arabia](#) on behalf of the Arab Group, have called for developed countries to provide at least $1 trillion annually to developing countries, but this is a wishful thinking proposal. The number being floated instead in private discussions is [$200 billion](#), which was rejected by developing nations as totally unacceptable. In the meanwhile, the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, ended without concrete progress on climate finance and "[only words of support for Baku](#)." It is highly doubtful that we will see a final text at COP29 with concrete numbers for the finance goal that corresponds to the actual needs of and demands from Global South. To make matters worse, the current geopolitical context, diminishing appetite for climate action among world leaders, and the fact that Donald Trump is returning to the White House do not bode well for the future

of climate action in general.

There are other processes underway at COP29 that are disconcerting. Several world leaders and government officials did not even bother to travel to Baku. The absence of Europe's major leaders from the summit is especially striking. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz opted, for different reasons, not to attend COP29. The leaders of the United States, Russia, China, India and Brazil also did not go to the UN climate conference. In other words, the leaders of the world's top polluters skipped COP29.

Climate scientist [Bill Hare](#) was spot-on when he explained the absence of big name world leaders from COP29 as "symptomatic of the lack of political will to act." Indeed, the prime minister of Papua New Guinea, one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change, decided not to attend COP29 in protest of the sincerity of developed countries to address the climate crisis, while the country's foreign affairs minister described the summit as a "[total waste of time](#)."

Another irony about COP29 is that the host country's president has defended oil and gas, calling them a "[gift from the god](#)." Of course, this raises the question of why COP29 is being held in Azerbaijan, a country whose exports rely almost totally on oil and gas. Or why COP28 and COP27 were held in the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, respectively, since both countries are major exporters of petroleum and thus have major vested interests in maintaining and even expanding the fossil fuel industry.

This year will surpass 2023 as the hottest year on record and will also be the first year in which the planet will be [more than 1.5 degrees Celsius](#) above the pre-industrial level. Yet the delegates at COP29 are still talking about the old climate benchmark when "1.5C has been deader than a doornail," according to [Zeke Hausfather](#), climate scientist at Berkeley Earth.

However, COP29 countries have taken a step toward the adoption of a global carbon market framework, that is, trading schemes in which carbon credits are sold and bought. Yet it is still unclear that carbon markets can be a reliable tool for combating climate change, as many critics contend that carbon offsets can [disincentivize decarbonization](#). This is, after all, the corporate world's go-to tool for addressing climate emissions. The European Union led the way in the creation

of an international [emissions trading system](#) (ETS) in 2005, but it has been widely regarded as a failed climate solution. [China](#) created its own national ETS in 2021, but most studies reveal that its implementation has had limited to very little impact on industrial CO_2 emissions.

Unfortunately, COP29, like all other UN climate change conferences preceding it, will end in disappointment. Moreover, pledges made at these global climate change conferences are voluntary and legally nonbinding. At last year's climate conference, countries promised to transition away from fossil fuels. What has been happening instead is that the burning of fossil fuels continued to rise in 2024, and [global carbon emissions](#) from fossil fuels hit a new high.

To say that time is running out to save humanity and the planet from a global climate catastrophe is an understatement. Yet, all indications are that the powers that be are bent on keeping fossil fuels around until they run out. Capitalism is of course the main cause of global warming, and reforming capitalism in a drastic way, and as soon as possible, might be the only way to proceed with effective climate action.

Thus, there is a dual challenge ahead for climate activists: Fighting climate change while seeking simultaneously to reform capitalism. Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury to wait for the end of capitalism as time to save the planet is fast running out. All concerned citizens must demand climate action from their own governments. We need to embrace grassroots strategies and nationwide campaigns. Climate activism and organized labor must find common ground. Hence the importance of a just transition; hence also the importance of a working-class strategy for climate change.

The problem is not simply fossil capital, but all major factions of the capitalist class, especially that of finance capital. [Banks](#) have financed fossil fuels with nearly $7 trillion since the Paris Agreement was adopted by nearly every country in 2015. Both corporate and finance capital defend neoliberalism and austerity economics, thus standing on the way to a just and much needed redistribution of wealth to build a clean energy infrastructure and thus end our reliance on energy generated from fossil fuels.

Neoliberalism and the climate crisis are interlinked. Neoliberal capitalism has commodified the planet's resources and has created a situation where short-term

profit-making is being put above the livelihood of workers and the state of the environment. Corporations have free rein to deplete natural resources in the name of profit and efficiency. Banks dominate fossil fuel financing because of short-term gains and because their primary goal is maximizing profit.

As COP29 draws to a close, there is not much hope for any major breakthroughs. Preparations for COP30, which will be convened in Belem, northern Brazil, next year, are already underway, with the host country planning to present an agenda that combines biodiversity, adaption and climate change. In the meantime, the annual global average temperature will most likely continue to rise as carbon emissions will increase, and the Trump administration will be busy undoing climate solutions.

There is a ton of work to do to save the planet from global warming. But it won't happen in global climate change conferences, and surely not without massive pressure from civil society.

Activists must not give up fighting the good fight. We have a world to win.

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Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice*: *Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); *Economics and the Left*: *Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021); *Illegitimate Authority: Facing the Challenges of Our Time* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2023); and *A Livable Future Is Possible: Confronting the Threats to Our Survival* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2024).

Sri Lanka's National People's Power Sweeps General Election

11-17-2024 ~ On October 15, [data from the Election Commission of Sri Lanka](#) showed that the National People's Power (NPP) coalition scored a decisive victory in Sri Lanka's first general election since defaulting on its external debt.

With 61.56 percent of the popular vote, the NPP won 159 seats in Parliament. This gave President Anura Kumara Dissanayake (AKD) a supermajority in parliament and the power to make constitutional amendments.

The NPP won a majority of the popular vote in 21 out of 22 electoral districts in the country. In the southern district of Hambantota, a traditionally left-wing Sinhala nationalist constituency that was the stronghold of the [Rajapaksa family](#), the NPP secured 66.38 percent of the vote.

In the central Nuwaraeliya district, where many of the voters are Tamil-speaking workers in tea estates, the NPP secured a 41.57 percent plurality of the vote. In the northern Jaffna district, a stronghold of conservative Tamil nationalist parties, the NPP secured a plurality, with 24.85 percent of the popular vote.

This is a significant turnaround for the NPP, as during the presidential election, AKD polled poorly in both the north and in the central tea estate regions.

These developments may indicate that traditional identity-based parties are undergoing a significant crisis of legitimacy, as economic grievances and bitterness toward the established political elite take center stage.

They also indicate the success of the NPP in driving a grassroots campaign that emphasized national unity, or in their words, "a national renaissance."

Several parliamentarians who were a mainstay in electoral politics for decades lost their seats entirely. The disintegration of the two great poles of Sri Lankan electoral politics—the center-right United National Party (UNP) and its breakaway Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), and the center-left Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and its breakaway Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP)—continued.

Sajith Premadasa's SJB, with just 17.66 percent of the vote, will sit in opposition. Namal Rajapaksa's SLPP secured just 3.14 percent of the vote. Ranil Wickremesinghe's new alliance, the New Democratic Front, secured just 4.49 percent of the vote.

Importantly, voter turnout declined from 79.46 percent in the September presidential election to 68.93 percent—the lowest turnout for an election since 2010. This likely played some role in boosting pro-incumbent bias as disenchanted voters of parties other than the NPP chose to stay at home.

Challenges Ahead
In the realm of economic policy, the new NPP government is sitting on the ticking time bomb that is Sri Lanka's 17th IMF program and its accompanying debt restructuring deal, sealed by AKD's predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe. One of AKD's key campaign promises was to conduct an independent debt sustainability analysis and renegotiate this deal. This will be much easier said than done.

The debt restructuring deal negotiated by Wickremesinghe includes novel instruments such as "governance-linked bonds" which link interest rates to the government's willingness to pass "anti-corruption" legislation—corruption being a dog whistle reserved for countries in the Global South that are insufficiently subordinated to the neoliberal paradigm.

The deal also includes "macro-linked bonds" which have no upside for Sri Lanka. According to these, higher GDP growth rates in the country will be met with higher interest payments to private bondholders, like BlackRock, who own the largest share of Sri Lanka's debt.

Some analysts predict an economic meltdown starting in 2027 when Sri Lanka will have to begin repaying its external debt, likely running down its foreign currency reserves and forcing it to borrow again from international bond markets. In order to deliver on its campaign promise of system change, the NPP will have to put an end to this debt spiral and begin to industrialize the country.

In the realm of foreign policy, the NPP will have to navigate the recently elected Trump administration, which is likely to double down on the Indo-Pacific Strategy to contain China. Following the end of Sri Lanka's Civil War in 2009, the U.S. has applied increasing pressure on the country, often leveraging human rights issues to push through a combination of economic and governance reforms.

In the past decade, the U.S. has attempted to push through economic agreements like the Millennium Challenge Compact which contained provisions to privatize land. It has also promoted military agreements like the Status of Forces Agreement and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, both of which aimed to improve interoperability between the U.S. and Sri Lankan military in order to draw the latter into the United States' New Cold War on China.

Should it choose to take on these tasks, the NPP will have to tap into the insurgent multipolar movement in the Global South in order to build a united front against debt and imperialism. They will need to rekindle the Bandung Spirit and restore Sri Lanka's leading position in the Non-Aligned Movement. Time will tell if the NPP is up to this task.

Internal Contradictions
A decisive factor in the next four years will be how the internal balance of forces plays out within the NPP coalition, where the biggest party is the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Many of the NPP's new parliamentarians are young and inexperienced and have few links with the old JVP. The latter was modeled on a Marxist-Leninist cadre-based party.

The ideological makeup of the NPP is therefore eclectic, including many middle-class professionals, academics, artists, and political activists. Some have a

markedly liberal cosmopolitan character that is in stark contrast to the old JVP's base of mainly rural cadres known for their militancy and patriotism. Managing this dialectic of old and new will be another challenge for AKD.

Meanwhile, the shock of an electoral wipe may force the right-wing forces, namely the UNP and SJB, to regroup. They will take every opportunity to evoke a red scare and paint even the most moderate reform as a communist takeover. They will use their links with imperialists in the West to do this.

Finally, there is the traditional nationalist camp which includes the Rajapaksas, various splinters of the Old Left, and Sinhala nationalists. It is clear that it is primarily the disenchanted voters of this bloc that form the bedrock of support for the NPP. Therefore, there will likely be much pressure on the NPP to live up to the populist and patriotic traditions of southern Sri Lanka.

By Shiran Illanperuma

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Source: Globetrotter

U.S. Recruits South Korea To Help Colonize And Militarize Space

11-15-2024 ~ The United States is colonizing and militarizing Earth's orbit, recruiting allies such as South Korea's Yoon Suk Yeol administration. More specifically, the U.S. Space Force is

creating a "swarm" of satellites that, when combined with AI, seeks to attain a god's eye view across all domains of war. This proliferated warfighter space architecture (PWSA) of small low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites would allow the United States—in its [Department of Defense's words](#)—"to sense, make sense, and act at all levels and phases of war, across all domains, and with partners, to deliver information advantage at the speed of relevance." These actions have started an international arms race to space. In 2020, China [applied](#) to the United Nations International Telecommunication Union to launch its own LEO satellites.

Yet, saddled with $35 trillion in debt, the United States can't do it alone. It needs its arms industries and allies such as South Korea. This has led the Yoon administration to launch its own [NewSpace program](#) to nurture its own aerospace industry. The colonization and militarization of Earth's orbit will generate [trillions of dollars](#) for war profiteers while impoverishing humanity and the planet.

On October 19, 2024, dozens of activists from struggles across South Korea held their first national gathering—the "National Discussion on the Space Industry And Militarization of Space"—opposing the Yoon administration's NewSpace program due to its destructive military, economic, and environmental costs.

South Korea's NewSpace
Held as part of Space4Peace's annual "Keep Space for Peace Week" actions (timed to coincide with the UN's World Space Week), the conference was held in Daejeon, one of the three locations for Yoon's regional space cluster. Sung-hee Choi, of the People Against the Militarization of Space and Rocket Launches, explained that LEO satellites are promoted for their potential to provide universal internet access, such as SpaceX's Starlink, with little mention of their dual military purpose. The U.S. Air Force recognized [in 1996](#) that this dual purpose would give it the "ultimate high ground" in warfare.

Choi explained how the United States's massive debt means it [needs](#) allies such as South Korea to win space colonization. In 2016, the U.S. signed a [space cooperation agreement](#) giving South Korea access to U.S. aerospace technology and knowledge. In 2022, the Yoon administration agreed to [house](#) a U.S. Space Force foreign command, [integrating](#) South Korea's satellites into the United States's military satellite network. In June 2024, South Korea conducted its first multi-domain military exercises with the United States and Japan that included the space domain. Then, in September 2024, South Korea [signed a Letter of](#)

[Intent](#) with the U.S. to share non-classified aerospace technology through the U.S. Space Forces-Space Joint Commercial Operations.

SpaceX is central to the United States's NewSpace approach to addressing its space needs via the private sector. Harnessing its reusable rocket technology, its [399](#) launches, and Starlink's [6,371](#) active satellites (60 percent of the world's total), SpaceX's Starshield (Starlink's military version) [provides](#) the satellite and launch services for the U.S. Space Development Agency's proliferated warfighter satellite architecture. Following the United States's lead, the Yoon administration is creating its own version of SpaceX: [Hanwha Aerospace](#).

Outwardly, the Yoon administration promotes its investment in aerospace as a source of regional development for underdeveloped areas. Yet, as Hyun-hwa Oh, co-president of Catholic Climate Action, mentioned, few people living in those places are aware of how these new industries are used for waging war and even fewer have a say in whether or not to host them. Worse, many are forced to choose between jobs building weapons or no jobs at all.

The Costs of War 4.0
The fourth industrial revolution is transforming the way we wage war. If satellites will integrate and control all domains (naval, air, land, space, and cyberspace), then at the heart of its command center (the Joint All-Domain Command and Control) will be AI and machine learning in order to ["extract intelligence autonomously and build predictive models of what they [satellites] observe."](#) As presenter Hee-eum noted, we are already witnessing the human costs of War 4.0 through Israel's Lavender AI program. As [reported in +972 magazine](#), during the first weeks of the Israeli bombing of Gaza, Lavender identified nearly all those that would be targeted for bombing. Despite knowing about the AI program's 10 percent error rate, most of the targets it selected were rubber-stamped in about "20 seconds."

War 4.0 also accelerates environmental destruction. As Hee-eum highlighted, the roundtrip to launch satellites releases greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to driving a car around the earth 70 times. Worse, it releases soot that [absorbs heat](#) and can increase temperatures in the upper atmosphere. Furthermore, the AI that will sift through the satellite data is highly energy-intensive. Even ChatGPT [requires](#) 10 times more electricity than a Google search. Furthermore, a Starlink satellite is deorbited after [five years](#) and then is burnt up upon reentry, producing

aluminum oxides that [deplete the ozone layer](). The U.S. Air Force prefers even [shorter life spans]() to enable more frequent upgrades. The expansion of these satellites will create more space junk burning up and polluting the atmosphere.

Still Fighting Cold War 1.0

If the conference launched the fight against the Yoon administration's militarization of space, it also remained connected to frontline struggles against militarization in South Korea, the United States's first line of attack against China. In particular, presenters spoke about the construction of airports with dual military functions. Kim Yeon-tae president of the People's Action to Nullify The New Saemangeum Airport, noted the absurdity of spending over 40 trillion won ($30 billion) to build 10 more airports in an area as small as South Korea, where [11 out of 15]() airports are running at a loss. Constructing new airports only made sense when taking into account their dual military use. More specifically, Saemangeum International Airport—right across from China and connected to the U.S. Kunsan Air Force Base—would allow the Air Force Base to launch more jets. Soon-ae Kim, chair of the Operating Committee of Jeju's Green Party, explained how building a second airport on the island as well as prospects of its military use violate Jeju's official designation as an island of peace.

Conference speakers and attendees made clear that their movement was rooted in frontline struggles against profiteering from human and environmental destruction and that it would continue. Yong-woon Hwang, a journalist and activist against the Jeju Naval Base, proposed building public awareness around AI and the militarization of space through the annual [Whistler Film Festival](). Ultimately, the activists gathered to build a better world we can live in and leave behind for our children.

By Dae-Han Song

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