



BANDUNG
BUILDING
THE WORLD
ANEW 70

EDITORS:

LEVENTE HORVÁTH

PÉTER KLEMENSITS

MÁTÉ SZAKÁLI

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BANDUNG 70 – BUILDING THE WORLD ANEW

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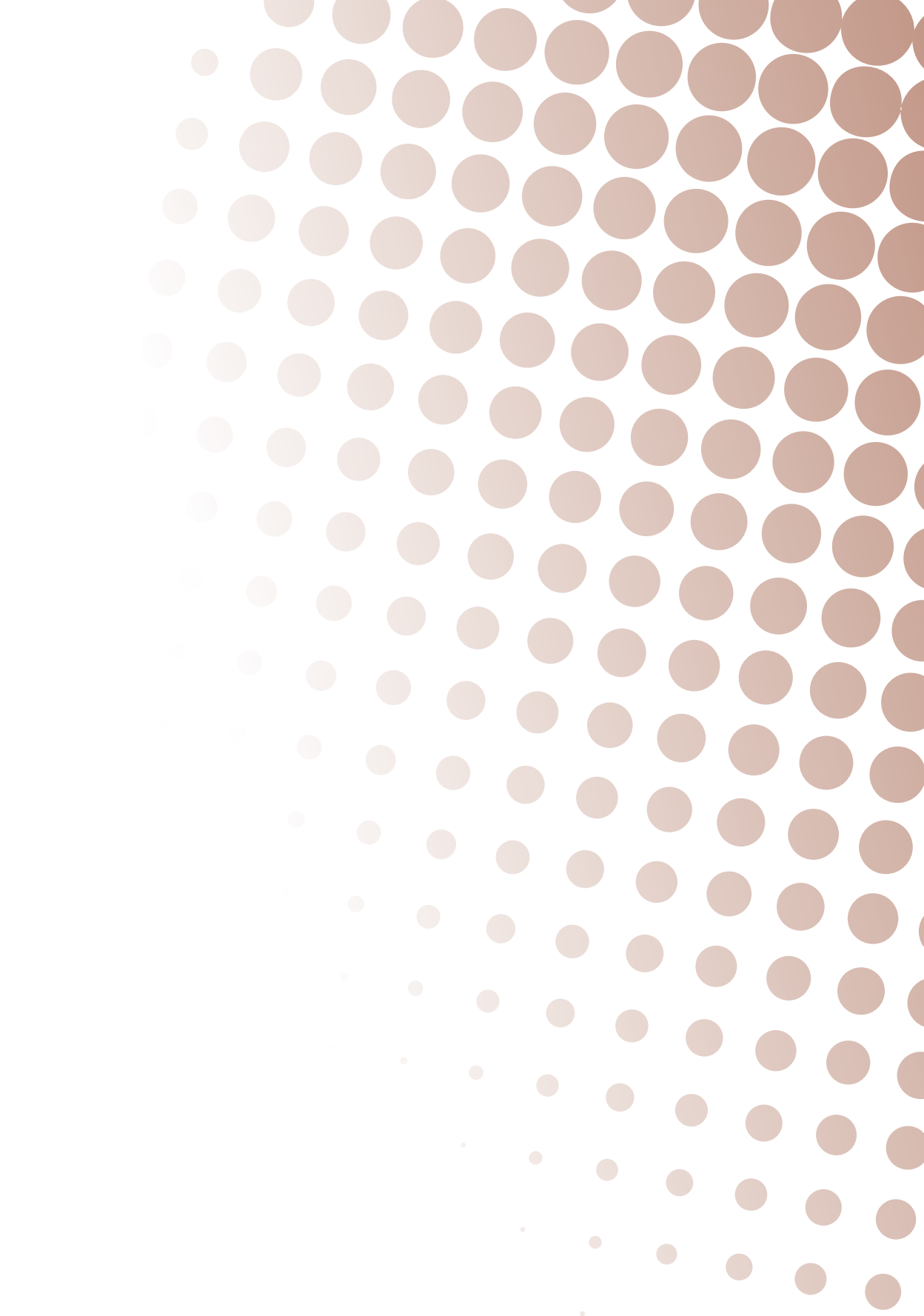
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EDITORS' PREFACE

The year 2025 marks the seventieth anniversary of the Asian–African Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955. That meeting of twenty-nine states and liberation movements represented a foundational moment in the history of international relations: it brought together the voices of newly independent and colonised peoples to articulate a vision of global coexistence based on equality, sovereignty, and mutual respect. The “Bandung Spirit” that emerged from the conference provided a moral and political vocabulary for challenging both the Cold War’s bipolar divisions and the hierarchies of the colonial order.

Seven decades later, the same principles continue to resonate in a world again undergoing systemic transformation. The diffusion of power, the emergence of new centres of influence, and renewed contestations over justice and development invite reflection on Bandung not merely as a historical episode but as a continuing frame of reference. Commemorating the seventieth anniversary therefore involves more than recalling the past: it offers an opportunity to reconsider Bandung’s contribution to global thought and to examine how its core ideas inform contemporary discussions of multipolarity, solidarity, and decolonial renewal.

Bandung 70 – Building the World Anew brings together scholars from Eurasia to engage with this task. The volume approaches Bandung as a living and evolving process rather than as a fixed event. Its aim is to investigate how the original agenda of political independence and moral equality has been translated into different institutional, regional, and intellectual contexts, and how these translations continue to shape the outlook of the Global South. The contributors represent a range of disciplinary and methodological perspectives, yet they converge in viewing Bandung as both an analytical category and a normative orientation: a way of thinking about international order that privileges dialogue, autonomy, and cooperation.

The essays assembled here trace Bandung’s presence across three broad and inter-related dimensions. The first concerns the reconfiguration of world order. Several contributions examine the systemic and structural implications of Bandung’s legacy, showing how the Non-Aligned Movement’s call for a more balanced international system anticipated later developments in global political economy. Annamária Art-

ner analyses the continuity between the Movement's developmental vision and the rise of BRICS as an alternative pole in world economic governance, while Gracjan Cimek interprets Bandung through the lens of critical security studies, identifying in contemporary notions of "indivisible security" the extension of an older critique of bloc politics. Complementing these perspectives, Affabile Rifawan and his co-authors explore BRICS and MIKTA as differing yet overlapping experiments in Southern multilateralism, and Huifang Tian traces the evolution of China's non-alignment strategy, demonstrating the durability of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in a multipolar environment. Collectively, these studies recast Bandung as a conceptual foundation for re-imagining global structures beyond hegemonic dominance.

A second set of contributions turns from the systemic level to the regional and diplomatic domain, showing how Bandung's ideals have been appropriated and adapted within Asian contexts. Ramachandra Byrappa's study of India highlights the transformation of non-alignment into the current policy of multi-alignment, revealing continuity in the underlying pursuit of strategic autonomy. Apicha Chutipongpisit analyses Thailand's efforts to balance its economic relations with China and its alliance with the United States, an exercise that reflects Bandung's pragmatic accommodation of principle and necessity. Péter Klemensits reconstructs Cambodia's long association with the Non-Aligned Movement and demonstrates how smaller states drew upon the moral capital of Bandung to navigate external pressures. Máté Szakáli examines forms of South-South cooperation in contemporary Southeast Asia, identifying regional initiatives that institutionalise Bandung's ethos of partnership and mutual benefit. Together these essays depict non-alignment not as a static doctrine but as a repertoire of strategies through which states pursue sovereignty and cooperation under changing historical conditions.

The final group of studies extends the discussion from diplomacy to intellectual history and moral philosophy. Gábor Búr situates the "Spirit of Bandung" within Africa's political imagination, linking it to decolonisation, Pan-Africanism, and present efforts toward continental integration. Ádám Stempler interprets Bandung as an ethical experiment in coexistence, arguing that the concept of (non-)alignment represents a normative stance on difference and dialogue rather than a purely strategic choice. In a complementary vein, Máté Szakáli connects Indonesia's state philosophy, *Pancasila*, with the universalist ambitions articulated at Bandung, proposing that both articulate a form of decolonial humanism grounded in relational equality and plural modernity.

Read together, these contributions position the Conference as a framework for producing alternative global imaginaries.

Across these three domains—the systemic, the regional, and the philosophical—the essays converge on a shared argument: Bandung constitutes an enduring framework for thinking about global order from the perspective of the post-colonial world. The conference’s guiding principles of sovereignty, mutual respect, non-interference, and cooperation remain analytically relevant and normatively compelling. They provide a basis for interpreting contemporary shifts in power and for envisioning a more equitable international community. The volume invites reflection on how these principles can be re-articulated considering present challenges such as economic dependency, environmental vulnerability, and technological inequality.

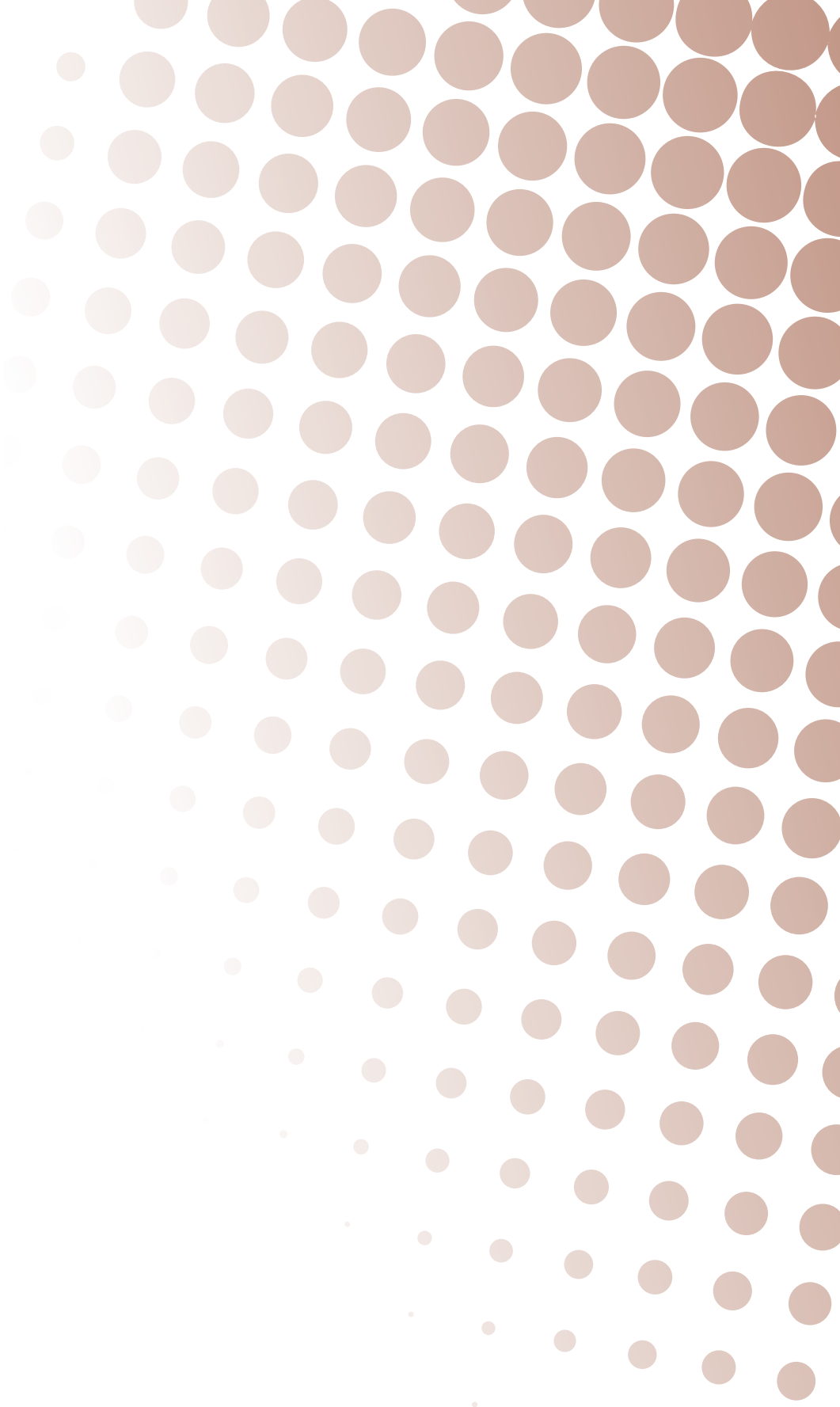
The editors are grateful to all contributors for their rigorous scholarship and to the supporting institutions that facilitated research and dialogue in honour of the seventieth anniversary of the Bandung Conference. In publishing this online volume, the Eurasia Center sought to bring together diverse regional perspectives and, in doing so, to recreate in scholarly form the spirit of deliberation that characterized the original 1955 Bandung Conference. The essays do not claim to speak for the Global South as a unified entity; rather, they illustrate the plurality of approaches through which Bandung’s legacy continues to be interpreted and applied. If the Conference once sought to build the world anew by asserting the agency of newly independent nations, this volume suggests that the same aspiration endures in the ongoing search for an international order based on justice and reciprocity. Seventy years after Bandung, the task remains both unfinished and indispensable.

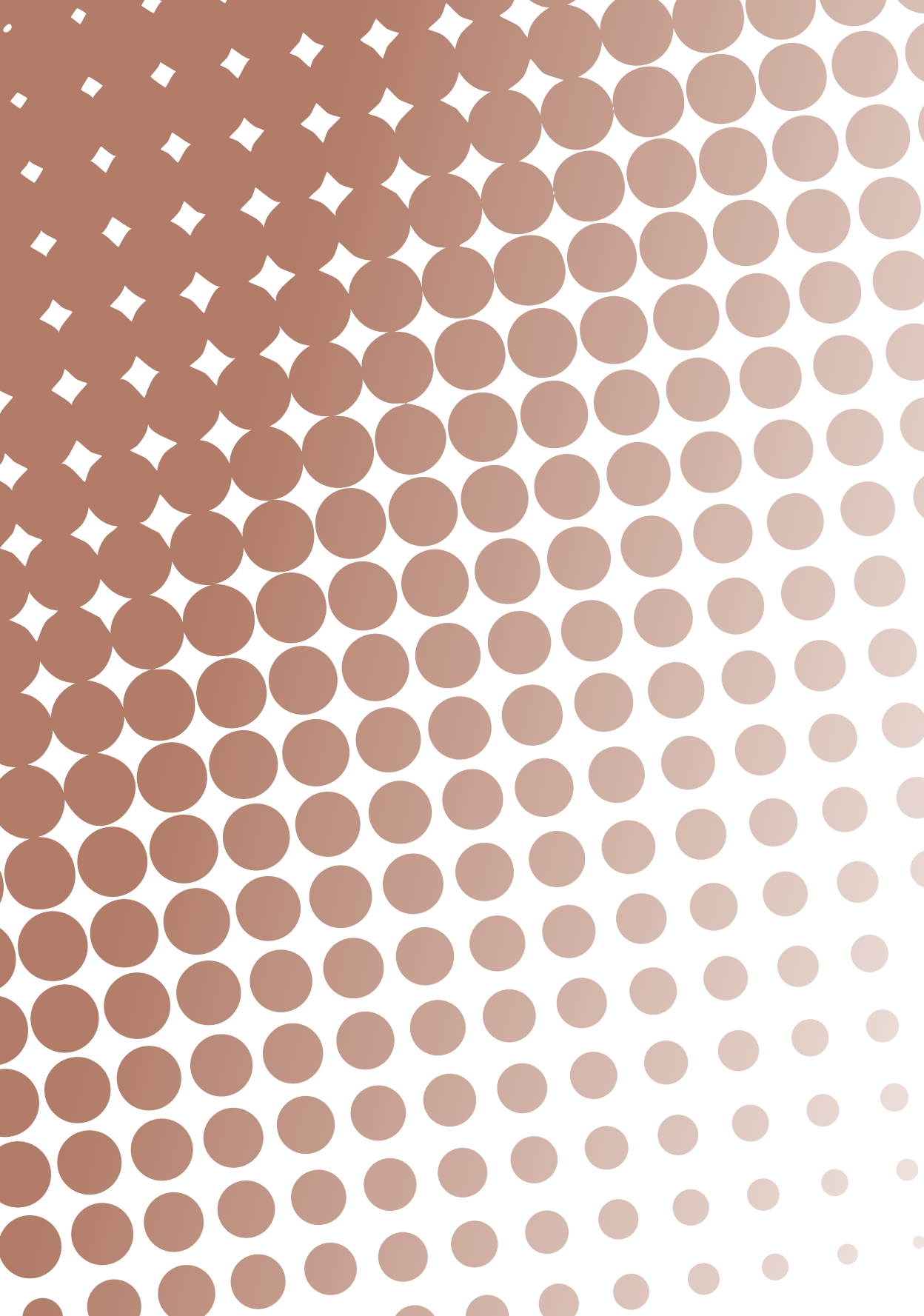
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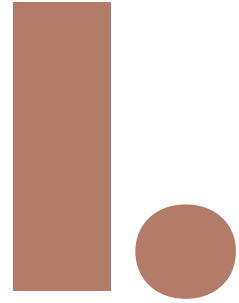
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**RECONFIGURING
THE GLOBAL
SOUTH: BANDUNG
AND THE SHIFTING
WORLD ORDER**

THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT, THE BRICS AND THE CHANGE OF THE WORLD ORDER

Annamária Artner¹

Abstract

The essay first discusses the basic mechanisms of the global capitalism, namely the uneven and combined development and the exploitative mechanisms of the global capital accumulation. This is followed by a discussion of forms and role of nationalism in the struggle against neocolonialism and imperialism and the economic aspects of NAM's activity since its foundation. The second part of the paper deals with the BRICS, its relation to NAM, and their economic weight in the global economy. The author concludes that the BRICS is the new NAM, and the BRICS has the potential to solidify the emerging multipolar world order.

Keywords: *BRICS, decolonization, global accumulation, imperialism, multipolarity, Non-Aligned Movement*

1. Introduction

The roots of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) go back to 70 years ago, 1955, when the first Asia-Africa conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia. The key organizers of this conference were Sukarno of Indonesia, Nehru of India and Mao and Chu En-lai of China. These leaders were held socialist, communist and social democratic views, but at the same time they also were patriots, i.e. nationalists in a non-exclusionary way.

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The final declaration of the Bandung conference laid down the framework of NAM in the 10-point Bandung Principles. The core of these principles was the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (the *Pancasila*), which were formulated by China and India in their agreement over Tibet in 1954. These five principles are as follows: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.

The declaration of the first conference of NAM in Belgrade, 1961, was made in the spirit of Bandung. It called for a general disarmament, a prohibition of nuclear weapons, the enlargement of the UN Security Council, a peaceful cooperation among countries, and stated that the lasting peace can only be achieved if the confrontation “between the old established and new emerging nationalist forces ...leads to a world where the domination of colonialism-imperialism and neocolonialism in all their manifestations is radically eliminated” (NAM, 1961, p. 6). An enlargement of NAM took place four years later in Havana, 1966, at a sharply anti-imperialist conference with an announcement of a struggle against “the Yankee imperialism and its allies” (Castro, 1966).

Today it seems that a change of the world order that the NAM countries claimed, has finally arrived. This paper aims at contributing to the understanding of why and how it has happened.

In what follows, I will describe the basic mechanisms of global capitalism, namely the uneven and combined development and the global cycles of accumulation. Then the forms and the role of nationalism in an imperialist world and the economic goals and results of NAM will be discussed.

The second part of the paper argues that the original role of NAM has been overtaken and revitalized by BRICS, which essentially overlaps with NAM both in membership and intentions but is much better organized than the latter. The paper concludes that a multipolar world, which is formulation in front of our eyes, will result in a global system that will be new in two senses. On the one hand its structure will be new, i.e. multicentric. On the other hand, the fall of neoliberal capitalism as the world-ruler, opens a possibility for the nations to choose their own ways of socio-economic and political development.

2. Basic Mechanisms of Global Capitalism

The NAM countries, as the whole Global South are interested in an independent and successful economic development. But can it be achieved within the framework of capitalism? The next sections will explore the answer, discussing the uneven and combined development and the global cycles of accumulation.

2.1. The Uneven and Combined Development

It is already obvious for everyone that the present world order has come to its end. Less agreement is on what precisely is ending now. The world of sovereign states, the global dominance of neoliberal economics, the capitalist world market, the structure and hierarchy of power, one or more of these – or something else.

At first glance it seems right to say that the origin of the present world order is the Westphalian Peace treaty that founded the world of sovereign states. Based on that, the changes we see today can rightly be analysed on a geopolitical basis. Looking from this angle, it seems that there is a structural change in the world order, as new emerging powers demand a bigger say in the governance of international relations. In this context the new international players, like China, Russia, India or Brazil and Iran, are the same as the ex-colonizer North Atlantic countries. The only difference is, the argumentation can continue, that former nations are now developing faster and taking over the economic and technological leadership from the latter ones in more and more economic sectors. The world order will change but the system remains. In this interpretation the political economic essence of the changes remains intact.

There is, however, another approach, that uses political economic thinking while also taking into consideration the geopolitical realities that directly form the international retaliation day by day. This approach is called geopolitical economic methodology (Desai, 2013). This puts emphasis on socio-economic relations, which have become an organizing power on an international level overtime, as the capitalist relations of production have globalized. In this framework of analysis both the production relations that prevails within each nation and the position and role of different nations in the international order play equally important role. It is because the relations of production, on the one hand, and the international position of nations, on the other, act and develop in a strong dialectical relationship.

Furthermore, there is another dialectical relation that is equally important for the geopolitical economic view. It is the relation between the state and the market that – based on the geographical and historical attributes – assign the place of a nation in the world order. Geopolitical economy emphasizes both the role of states and the spontaneous mechanisms of market as factors of uneven and combined development. Uneven, because of the market competition, and combined, because of the state intervention into mechanisms of the market.

The successful interaction of these two factors, market and state, can make a change in the position of a country in the competitiveness order of nations possible. This political economic lawfulness was established by many thinkers at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, including Hilferding and Lenin, but was elaborated in detail by Trotsky (1930). He specified the “privilege of historic backwardness”. The concept has been further developed by George Novack, Alexander Gerschenkron, Ernest Mandel and others, sometimes without a reference to Trotsky (Linden, 2007).

Trotsky emphasized that learning from the advanced nations not only let a backward nation to shorten the way of economic, technical and institutional development, but also helps it to combine the imported technologies and solutions with its own economic basis, social relations, institutions, and culture. The combination of all these may not be always successful – particularly if the state is not enough effective – but at least offers an opportunity to arise and become a forerunner.

The evidence of the uneven development is not difficult to find in the history. It is enough to think of the shifts of the centre of world economy from Greece to Portugal, then to Spain, after it to Netherland, followed by England and, in the 20th century, to the United States. Today we see a new shift to a multipolarity, with the leadership of China. Previously, we also saw rapid catching up processes in East Asia, in case of Japan after WWI, then the newly industrializing economies like South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hongkong. These examples have contained the elements of the combined development. So did the experiments of the socialism-oriented Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union. However, the most convincing example is the rise of the People’s Republic of China.

With the rise of China and other large developing countries (Russia, India, Brazil, Indonesia etc.) and their partnerships, the world began to move towards a multipolarity. It happens despite the countermeasure of the developed countries to preserve their

privileges on a global level. The contradicting tendencies generated by the imperialist and anti-imperialist forces give the dynamics of the international system.

2.2. The Exploitative Mechanisms of the Capitalist World Order

The key to the struggle of the Global South for a better world lies in the production relations. When they argue for the change of the world, they mean a demolition of the rule of the tyranny of transnational monopolies and their superstructure. After the 1970s we can speak about a transnational monopoly capitalism, which became unipolar and hegemonic after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The capitalist world economy is hierarchic – see *Figure 1*. On the tip of the pyramid stands the United States. Together with the most developed Western countries it forms the centre of the world economy. Under them lay those semi-periphery countries (like Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain, or the newly industrialised economies in Asia) that have deeply integrated into the political economic structures of the centre. This is followed by the integrated periphery, e.g. the 11 Central and Eastern European member states of the European Union, and Mexico. Under these levels we find the global semi-periphery and periphery. In every level and within every country there are internal centres and internal (semi-) peripheries. We can say that the structure of the capitalist world order resembles to a self-similar fractal²: its global shape is like its internal forms.

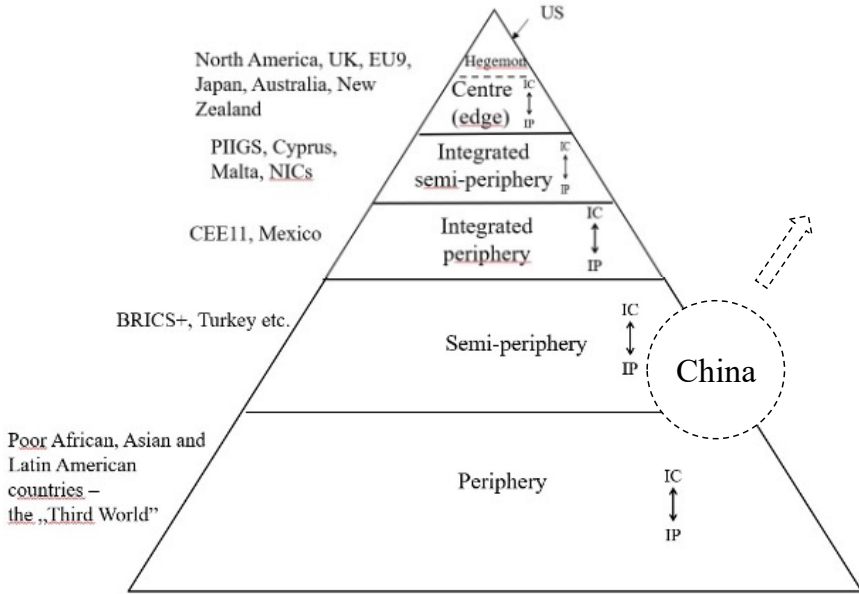
Figure 1 also shows China, rising to a position of a new pole of the world economy and so has done Russia with its military operation in Ukraine and the strengthening of its economy in the last decade.

In the decades after the Second World War, this hierarchy was reproduced by the global circulation of capital, through which the centre siphoned off the natural and human resources of the periphery.

The developing countries have long criticised the economic policy of the developed countries the activity of transnational corporations that caused many troubles in the

2 “A fractal is a geometric shape containing detailed structure at arbitrarily small scales, usually having a fractal dimension strictly exceeding the topological dimension. Many fractals appear similar at various scales, as illustrated in successive magnifications of the Mandelbrot set. This exhibition of similar patterns at increasingly smaller scales is called self-similarity, also known as expanding symmetry or unfolding symmetry.” (Gouyet, 1996).

Figure 1: The hierarchy of global capitalism



Note: Abbreviations: CoC: the Centre of the Centre (the Core); PIIGS: Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain; BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South-Africa; CEE11: 11 Central and Eastern European member states of the EU; IC: Internal Centre – the elite; IS: Internal (Semi-)periphery – smaller capitals, wage labourers, the poor etc.

Source: The author's own work.

developing world: negative trade balance, deficit in the current account, dual economies and monocultures, enclaves of transnational corporations without spin-off effects in host countries, reproduction of underdevelopment by forcing specialisation along the so called comparative advantages, depreciation of currencies, deformation of the structure of production towards the need of the developed partner countries instead of the need of the domestic development, neocolonial dependency, indebtedness and debt trap etc. – just to mention a few.

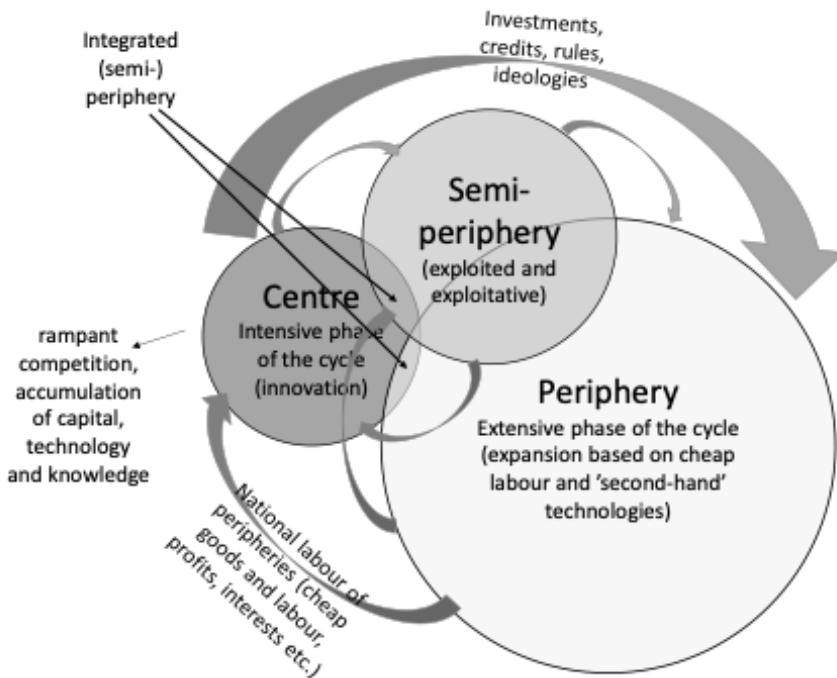
Less has been said about the spontaneous effects of the international turnover that have covertly eaten up the resources of developing countries and deprived them from the capital that would have been needed for their development. These effects are symbolized in *Figure 2* and work as follows.

Investments and credits flow from the centre to the low-wage countries in the periphery and ideologies, rules and habits are accompanied with them. In the periphery the

financial inflows and investments generate an extensive development, based on the second and third line (i.e. obsolete) technologies of the centre. The invested capital yields profits, and the credits return with interest, but these make the donors richer. The returned money in the centre is used to finance research, development and innovation (and the high standard of living of the working classes). In this way the accumulation goes on in the centre and not in the periphery. Lacking sufficient amount of capital, the periphery cannot invest enough in its own development. Furthermore, the extensive development generate demand for labour and drives up wages. The increasing wages evaporate the competitiveness of the periphery and further limits its ability to accumulate capital. New waves of investments, credits and technologies from the centre help to get out from this trap temporarily but the production circle continues in the same way and feeds the centre not the periphery.

The semi-periphery stands in-between: it plays the role of a centre in relation to the periphery and the role of a periphery in relation to the centre. The position of the

Figure 2: Global cycles of capital accumulation



Source: The author's own work.

integrated (semi)peripheries is even more complicated since they are exploited by the centre even more hiddenly.

3. The Role of Nationalism in the Change of the World Order

The peace in the Westphalian world order did not prove to be durable. Economic competition has become even sharper. New powers emerged both in Europe and North America already from the end of 18th century that fuelled market competition and increased hunger for accumulation. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century more and more thinkers began to speak about imperialism (Hobson, 1902; Hilferding, 1910; Lenin, 1916; Spengler, 1918) and the two world wars – both are essentially between European countries to redistribute the world – justified them. However, imperialism has not disappeared. Instead, it has evolved through institutional and structural changes and after the fall of the Soviet Union arrived at its most organized and centralized form.

Our contemporary world in the 21st century is about an upheaval of rivalry among sovereign and imperialist states on the one hand and states that wish to real sovereignty on the other. A fight for sovereignty demands a patriotic and national policy. To convince people to back a policy of sovereignty the cohesion of the nation must be strengthened. The elements of a cohesion are found in the history and culture and form the basis of national feelings. However, it is not all the same what kind of nationalism we aim at to awaken! It is important to treat nationalism very carefully as it has different faces. I call the two poles of nationalism a retrograde and a progressive nationalism.

The retrograde nationalism reflects the interests of the ruling classes. The ruling class in global capitalism is the capitalist class, or the bourgeoisie. Such nationalism is xenophobic and exclusionary, based on the idea of a superiority of the given nation and the inferiority of others. It also contains elements of full-fledged or “only” cultural racism. The retrograde nationalism has a strong predator feature. It is characteristic to imperialist nations and serves their imperialist purposes very well. With this ideology the working classes of the imperialist nation can be persuaded to serve the policy of oppressing – attacking, killing – other peoples. The retrograde-predatory nationalism can take the form of a group-exceptionalism, like for example the belief in the supe-

riority of Europeaness, that was generated in the era of colonization to justify the brutal oppression of other, “non-white” peoples in other continents.

In contrast, the progressive nationalism is non-exclusionary and non-racist. It is an expression of the love of nation, its history, land, language and culture. It is a nationalism of people. So, the progressive nationalism has a popular character. This progressive-popular nationalism has always been the ideology of national struggles of independence. This nationalism, which fuels the common wish of people for liberty, is a natural enemy of colonialism and imperialism.

Nationalism does not exclude international solidarity. It is true both types of nationalism. The imperialist nations with their retrograde nationalism can be solidaristic with each other against anti-imperialist forces that attack them. On the other hand, the progressive-popular nationalisms can unite in an internationalist fight against imperialism.

A good example for the popular nationalism is the formation of Indonesia under Sukarno. The leader and first president of the country was convinced that Indonesia should be built on three ideas: nationalism, religion and Marxism. Sukarno wrote: “I am a convinced nationalist, a convinced Moslem, a convinced Marxist” (cited by Bishku, 1992, p. 108).

Another example for the progressive role of nationalism and its connection with internationalism is the nation building of the People’s Republic of China during the years of the Afro-Asian solidarity movement between 1955 and 1965 – just when the non-aligned movement was born. Zhiguang Yin explains that this “internationalist synchronicity” allowed “the PRC to associate its national salvation initiative with a global anti-imperialist unity, overcoming the limit of the ethno-centric nationalism that often leads to expansionism and ethnic conflict.” Culture and cultural decolonization played a central role in the process of state making in the Third World in general and in China special. This process was based on “anti-imperial and anti-colonial experiences” of the people (Yin, 2022, pp. 2-3).

From this point of view, it is important to underline that the Final Communiqué of the Asian–African conference of Bandung in 1955 discussed cultural cooperation on the second place after economic cooperation and before political cooperation. For the Third World, cultural emancipation is much more important than one in the West would think, since colonization effected the soul of people at least as deeply as

the economy of the colonized regions. This severe destruction of the souls – peoples’ mind, thought and consciousness – is that can only be repaired by decolonization.

“Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. [...] Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the “thing” which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.” (Fanon, 1961, pp. 36-37)

However, decolonization cannot be achieved by countries individually. To cooperate in this struggle, people must understand their common fate. These two processes, decolonization of the individuals and decolonization of all people, can unite in the cultural cooperation of the oppressed. This cooperation – the leaders of Asia and Africa who met in Bandung understood it well – is a decolonial fight: a fight against racialism, that has been “a means of cultural oppression” – as the Bandung Declaration wrote.

“The Asian-African Conference took note of the fact that the existence of colonialism in many parts of Asia and Africa, in whatever form it may be, not only prevents cultural co-operation but also suppresses the national cultures of the people. Some colonial powers have denied to their dependent peoples basic rights in the sphere of education and culture which hampers the development of their personality and also prevents cultural intercourse with other Asian and African peoples” (Bandung, 1955, pp. 3-4).

Kwame Nkrumah, a pan-African liberation fighter and the first president of Ghana, thought that neo-colonialism was the last stage of imperialism (Nkrumah 1965). He wrote it in the 1960s, but the form of imperialism continued to develop after that as well and took the form of a unipolar hegemonic transnational monopoly capitalism after the fall of the Soviet Union (Artner, 2023b; Artner, 2023c).

Decolonization is essentially an anti-imperialist struggle that cannot be imagined without a feeling of nationalism. As imperialism oppresses nations and strives for abolishing them, “imperialism and nationalism are irreconcilable positions” – says Yoram Hazony (cited by Békés, 2020, p. 93) A nationalism that fights against imperialism is a progressive nationalism.

4. Economic Aspects of NAM's Activity

The non-aligned movement as it was launched in 1962 had both political and economic goals. The political will was clear. First, not to take part in the cold war and not to be a collateral damage of the hostilities between the big powers, shortly speaking to prevent a nuclear Armageddon. Second, to establish real sovereignty in the Global South. Third, to build a new world – “to build the world anew” (Sukarno, 1960) – that was meant to build international relations based on the principles of peaceful coexistence. In the first part of the 1960s these political goals enjoyed a priority.

The economic aspect of non-alignment began gaining importance in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This time the goal was to ensure the possibility for economic development, i.e. to develop domestic infrastructure, industry, food production and technology etc. For this, friendly relations both with great powers and an access to the markets of the Global North were essential. Not less important was to improve economic connections with each other. At this time the slogan was collective self-reliance that expressed both the national goals and the belief that together the developing countries were strong enough to change the terms of international trade. The demand for a New International Economic Order in 1974 summarized these aspirations.

Although most of the wishes have not been materialized, some results can be mentioned. For example, there was a movement of workers and experts from one country to another, which meant rendering technical assistance to each other. There were also events of cultural exchange and programs to change students and teachers. However, none of these were so meaningful as were the projects provided by the Eastern European socialist countries, and, particularly, the Soviet Union to the developing countries.

It must also be mentioned that in several cases, mostly in Africa, non-alignment was more a label than a reality. The ex-colonies could hardly improve their position against the ex-colonizers because of their deep underdevelopment and lack of capital, technology and knowledge. In many cases their elites were corrupt, and/or states were not enough strong to reach radical change. In other cases, imperialism destroyed the anti-imperialist attempts. The indebtedness of the developing world in the 1970s and in the 1980s has made this situation even more severe. Because of these, many Global South countries, particularly in Africa, have remained tied upon the developed countries and sacrificed their non-alignment status for short term economic advantages

(Bhattacharya, 2024). The formulation of multipolarity in the world and the involvement of China in the development of Africa began to change this situation.

5. NAM and BRICS – Common Goals

The decades following the declaration of non-alignment represented an era of decolonization, and strength of the developing world increased. The foundation of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva in 1964, the establishment the Group of 77 (G77) at this conference, and the demand for a New World Order in 1971, which was the peak of the self-organization movement of the Global South in the 20th century, were the milestones of the endeavour of developing countries to improve their position in the global hierarchy. However, for many reasons that we cannot discuss here, these efforts proved to be insufficient to overcome neo-colonialism. A new wave of the emancipatory movement of the Global South began in the 21st century. This new wave was led by BRICS, with China and Russia as the main engines of it.

BRICS seems to be a new and higher form of non-alignment. Today, it is BRICS that represents the will of the Global South to develop according to their domestic needs and independently from the pressure of the global imperialist superstructure. BRICS is a straight continuation of Bandung spirit. The Kazan Declaration that was issued on the 16th summit of BRICS in 2024 speaks about „cooperation based on mutual interests”, „mutual respect”, „sovereign equality”, „peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomacy” and „a more equitable, just, democratic and balanced multipolar world order” (BRICS, 2024).

BRICS members and partner countries, except for Turkey, are either members or observers of NAM. The five founding countries of BRICS have been the engine of cooperation among Global South countries. BRICS members initiated or actively supported the Belt and Road Initiative, the International North-South Transport Corridor, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the UNASUR – to mention only the most well-known cooperations. NAM-countries individually are taken part in these projects. NAM, as an organization, has nothing similar. It has mostly produced lengthy documents, without any material consequence. The topics discussed at its meetings have been diverse, from underdevelopment and poverty to environmental issues and international law, without concrete actions. It is the reality despite the fact

that NAM has constructed three-year action plans in different fields of common interests (disarmament, culture, human rights etc.) (Artner, 2023a). After the 1970s NAM has become more a symbol of a will of the Global South for a peaceful and just world, than an organization which leads the struggle of a powerful movement for that.

According to Samir Amin, the “Bandung project” failed because NAM represented an idea that a national capitalist development within the framework of global capitalism was possible. However, it was wrong. With the emergence of neoliberalism in the 1980s the Global South had to face with the experience “that peripheral capitalism offers them nothing acceptable at a social or political level. (Amin, 2006:180)”. This project of a nationalist capitalist development, continued Amin, was “obsolete and utopian.” Because of that, he argued already in the 1980s, “in the 1955–75 period the national bourgeoisie had exhausted its historical role” and “the Bandung project reached a dead end because of its bourgeois character and because the pseudo-concept of a non-capitalist path was fundamentally opportunist (Amin, 2006, p. 181)”. Hard words, but the developments seem to prove them.

In the 21st century it is not NAM, but the socialist China, led by a communist party, that shows a way out of the neocolonial order. This leading role takes the form of an economic and technological help, and the developing countries are usually keen to participate in a cooperation with China. It is because China’s foreign policy is rooted in the Panchsheel and aims at win-win agreements. Chinese nationalism has a strong international and anti-imperialist vein and does not aim at a capitalist development. On the contrary! The modern Chinese nationalism was hammered out in a struggle of independence led by a communist party. China’s nationalism is a popular-progressive one, that has been filled with a pride that the Chinese people are building socialism. The nationalism of China neither has an ethnic character. On the contrary! It emphasizes that China is a multi-ethnic state. As the Chinese constitution goes:

„After waging protracted and arduous struggles, armed and otherwise, along a zigzag course, the Chinese people of all nationalities led by the Communist Party of China with Chairman Mao Zedong as its leader ultimately, in 1949, overthrew the rule of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, won a great victory in the New-Democratic Revolution and founded the People’s Republic of China. Since then the Chi-

nese people have taken control of state power and become masters of the country...

...The victory in China's New-Democratic Revolution and the successes in its socialist cause have been achieved by the Chinese people of all nationalities, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, by upholding truth, correcting errors and surmounting numerous difficulties and hardships." (Constitution of the PRC, 2004, Preamble)

We could cite many more parts from the Constitution that prove the socialist and international character of China, but we have no place for it here. It is worth to read it.

Imperialism caused two world wars followed by a cold war until the fall of the Soviet Union. In the next 17 years the unipolar hegemonic transnational capitalism seemed strong and prosperous. However, the 2008 crisis of Europe and the US came and proved to be long-lasting. In 2009 the first formal meeting of BRICS took place.

Since imperialism has built on the value extracted from the Global South, its decline has accelerated as the connection between the centre and the periphery began to weaken. This process of detachment, in which the ex-colonies reduce, cut and replace their exploitative ties with the ex-colonizers is also called delinking (Amin 1985), decoupling (Dugin, 2004) and – in reference to the sanctions – forced delinking (Artner 2023c). It is also proceeds through the “friendshoring” policy of the Global North itself that force countries to choose a side – a policy that NAM has been opposing from its genesis. A real sovereignty in the Global South is born by this delinking, and while it is historically inevitable, the process is arduous and burdened with ups and downs.

The process of detachment has accelerated with the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China planned by the Communist Party of China. This project, according to its Action Plan, reflects the “Silk Road Spirit”, that is „peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit”, and aims at to serve “the interest of the world community” by promoting „the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas” (BRI, 2013). These goals are in line with that of the NAM.

At time of writing these words BRICS has 11 full member countries of which 10 accepted the invitation to become a member, while Saud Arabia is „on the fence”: it has not given a positive answer officially yet but maintains its activity in the grouping. BRICS has another 12 partners. Of these 23 countries all but four (South Africa, Saud-Arabia, Uzbekistan and Turkey) are members or observer countries of NAM. Out of the 29 countries that took part in the first Asia-Africa conference in Bandung, 1955, 10 is now a member or partner of BRICS and seven out of the 25 founding countries of NAM in Belgrade, 1961, is now a member or partner country of BRICS. BRICS is even more linked to NAM-countries indirectly, through China’s BRI. Until February 2025, 149 countries (plus Palestine) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China to take part in BRI projects (Green FDC, 2025). These number is higher than the number of NAM-member countries, even if we deduct the 17 European and 8 G20 countries that have also signed the MoU.

In 2023 the president of Uganda, who led a successful liberation struggle against the bloodthirsty dictator Idi Amin in 1986, was elected to the chairman of NAM between 2024 and 2027. At the Kazan-summit of BRICS in 2024 November, Uganda became a partner country of BRICS. Currently NAM has is eight working groups out of which five is led by BRICS-members or partners (Algeria, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran).

6. NAM and BRICS – Global Weights

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the world has become increasingly capitalist, uni-centric and hierarchic. It is obvious for everyone, who knows history that power can only be overcome through power. Power means economic, military, and ideological power in an organized manner. All features are important: economy, military, ideology and organization. NAM has never had anything similar to that except for wishful thinking. The preconditions for changing the world have been created by countries that have not been members of NAM.

Taking into consideration of the global mechanisms of accumulation, discussed above, which hinders the periphery to catch up in economic and technological terms, an engine of the development of the periphery must come from outside the global capitalist system. This is what BRICS has represented. The economic locomotive of BRICS is China, a non-member of NAM. Its close partner, Russia, is neither a NAM-country.

Table 1: BRICS and NAM membership overlapping and GDP weight

Country	BRICS-member	BRICS-partner	NAM-member	NAM-observer	GDP (PPP) bn int. \$
Algeria		x	x		826.1
Belarus		x	x		293.1
Bolivia		x	x		139.2
Brazil	x			x	4,702.0
China	x			x	37,070.0
Cuba		x	x		21.6
Egypt	x		x		2,230.0
Ethiopia	x		x		434.4
India	x		x		16,024.4
Indonesia	x		x		4,661.5
Iran	x		x		1,700.0
Kazakhstan		x		x	830.6
Malaysia		x	x		1,370.9
Nigeria		x	x		1,490.0
Russia	x			x	6,910.0
Saudi Arabia	?		x		2,110.0
South Africa	x		x		993.8
Thailand		x	x		1,770.0
Turkey		x			3,460.0
Uganda		x	x		170.6
United Arab Emirates	x		x		849.8
Uzbekistan		x	x		428.2
Vietnam		x	x		1030.0
Total	77,685,9	11,830,3	36,543,6	49,512.6	89,516.2
As of world total GDP (%)	39.9	6.1	18.8	25.4	46.0

Source: IMF for 22 countries and Trading Economics for Cuba.

Figure 3: GDP of the world by groups of countries PPP current int. \$ (2023)

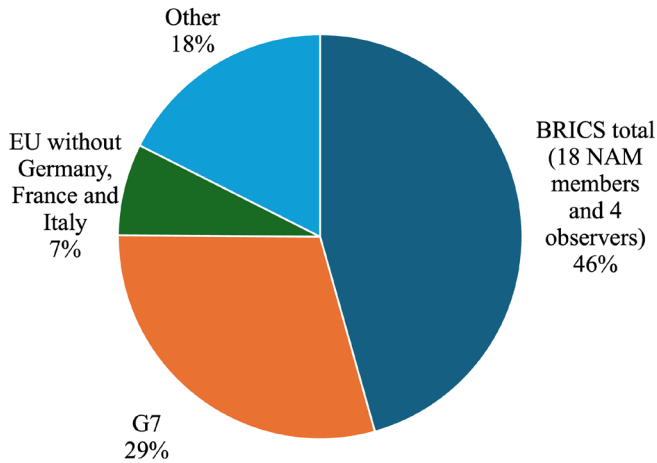
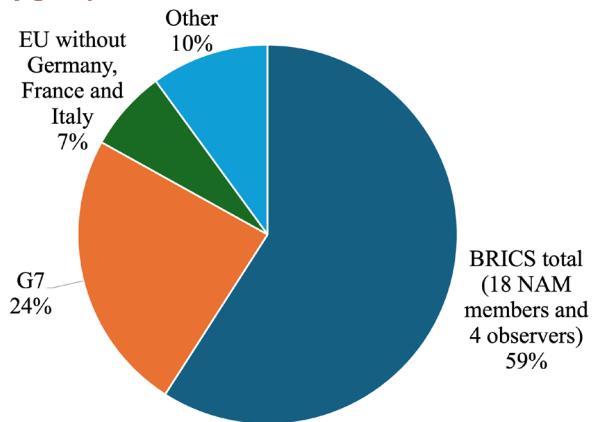


Figure 4: Manufacturing production of the world by groups of countries PPP current int. \$ (2023)



Source: World Development Indicators for share of manufacturing, IMF for GDP. Note: Cuba: share of manufacturing: 2022; GDP 2023; World Bank, Share of manufacturing: Japan, 2022; US, 2021; Canada, 2020.

However, BRICS and NAM overlap significantly. Out of the 23 members or partners of BRICS, 18 are members and 4 are observers of NAM. There is only one BRICS-partner that is neither a member nor an observer in NAM. This is Turkey, a member of NATO.

Table 2: Weight of manufacturing within the BRICS-NAM group (2023)

BRICS members	Manufacturing, value added (% of GDP) 2023	GDP PPP bn int. \$ 2023	Manufacturing, bn int. \$ 2023	Share of world manufacturing (%) 2023
China	26.2	34,540.9	9,043.0	32.2
India	12.9	14,619.8	1,890.7	6.7
Russian Federation	12.4	6,512.1	810.5	2.9
Indonesia	18.7	4,334.7	809.2	2.9
Turkiye	19.5	3,277.5	640.6	2.3
Brazil	13.3	4,456.6	594.1	2.1
Thailand	24.9	1,683.1	419.3	1.5
Viet Nam	23.9	1,502.7	358.9	1.3
Egypt, Arab Rep.	14.9	2,123.0	316.3	1.1
Iran, Islamic Rep.	19.4	1,600.1	310.6	1.1
Saudi Arabia	14.8	2,032.6	300.6	1.1
Malaysia	23.0	1,279.2	294.4	1.0
Nigeria	15.4	1,414.6	217.3	0.8
South Africa	13.0	960.5	124.5	0.4
Kazakhstan	12.3	783.8	96.0	0.3
United Arab Emirates	10.8	797.9	86.5	0.3
Uzbekistan	18.9	396.0	74.7	0.3
Algeria	9.3	777.0	72.2	0.3
Belarus	23.0	276.4	63.6	0.2
Uganda	15.6	157.4	24.6	0.1
Ethiopia	4.5	400.0	17.9	0.1
Bolivia	10.2	133.8	13.6	0.0
Cuba	10.7	21.3	2.3	0.0
BRICS members total	19.8	72,378.2	14,304.0	51.0
BRICS partners total	19.5	11,702.6	2,277.7	8.1
BRICS total	19.7	84,080.7	16,581.7	59.1
BRICS/NAM total (without Turkiye)	19.7	80,803.2	15,941.0	56.8
World	15.2	184,257.5	28,074.5	100.0

Source: World Development Indicators for the shares of manufacturing, IMF for GDP. Note: Cuba: share of manufacturing is for 2022; source for GDP is World Bank.

BRICS gives bulk of the economic, technological and military power of the Global South. In 2023 the 23 BRICS-related countries represented 46 percent of the world total GDP. Without Turkey the weight was 44.2 percent. In comparison, the share of G7 (Canada, US, UK, Germany, Italy, France and Japan) was only 29 percent in the global GDP (*Table 1.* and *Figure 3*).

Manufacturing is the base for production, services and the army (*Figure 4*). However, due to the activity of transnational corporations, their value chains, investment policy and the logic of global accumulation discussed above, the developed countries have gone through a deindustrialisation process in the last decades. In the meantime, industrial development has been evolved in the peripheries. The consequences were so severe in the Global North as to awakening movements against trade liberalization.

Table 2 and *3* show the manufacturing potential of the Global South and the Global North. The 22 NAM-related countries that are also BRICS-related countries accounted for 56.8 percent of the world manufacturing in 2023. The weight of total BRICS is 59 percent. China gives the bulk of this share (32.2%), but the individual share of India, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil is also bigger than that of the United Kingdom, France or Italy. The weight of manufacturing in the GDP is almost 20 percent in the NAM/BRICS-group on average and this is also larger than that of the G7 (12.4%) or the European Union (14.7%).

In comparison, according to the World Development Indicators, in 1991 the share of manufacturing in the GDP of the G7 countries was between 16 and 25 percent. Today it is only 8 to 19 percent. For the United States the figures are 16 and 11 percent respectively.

The economic power has shifted from the centre of global capitalism to the periphery, and this has changed the world.

7. Summary and Conclusions

We discussed the basic mechanisms of global capitalism, namely uneven and combined development and the exploitative mechanisms of the global capital accumulation. These led us to the conclusion that within the framework of global capitalism there has been no possibility for catching up to the advanced nations. Any national development demands a weakening of the participation in the global capitalist division of

Table 3: Weight of manufacturing in the G7 and the EU, 2023

Country and country groups	Manu- facturing, value added (% of GDP) 2023	GDP PPP bn int. \$ 2023	Manu- facturing, bn \$ 2023	Share of world manu- facturing (%)	Share of world GDP (%)
United States	10.5	27,720.7	2,910.7	10.4	15.0
Japan	19.2	6,398.3	1,228.5	4.4	3.5
Germany	18.5	5,876.4	1,089.3	3.9	3.2
Italy	15.4	3,490.5	536.4	1.9	1.9
France	9.7	4,211.4	409.8	1.5	2.3
United Kingdom	8.3	4,137.4	342.4	1.2	2.2
Canada	9.0	2,488.5	224.0	0.8	1.4
G7	12.4	54,323.3	6,741.1	24.0	29.5
European Union	14.7	27,089.4	3,974.1	14.2	14.7
EU without Germany, France and Italy	14.3	13,511.0	1,938.5	6.9	7.3
G7 and EU together	12.8	67,834.3	8,679.6	30.9	36.8
World	15.2	184,257.5	28,074.5	100.0	100.0

Source: World Development Indicators for share of manufacturing and IMF for GDP. Note: share of manufacturing for Japan is for 2022; for the US is for 2021; for Canada is for 2020.

labour. To reach this goal a real independence is needed, a national sovereignty and a peaceful international order that makes it possible. A fight for a national sovereignty needs a feeling of nationalism. To make clear what nationalism should it be, we discussed the types of nationalism. We can conclude, that although all nationalisms work against the present structure of globalization, only the progressive-popular nationalism, that lacks the elements of exclusion and exceptionalism can act as an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ideology. Such nationalism we found in the struggles of independence of the Global South, and particularly in China when the formulation of the nation had been interwoven with anti-imperialism.

In the second part of the essay, we went around the relation between NAM and BRICS. The conclusion here is that the new NAM is the BRICS. The latter has the economic and organizational power to achieve the NAM's original objectives.

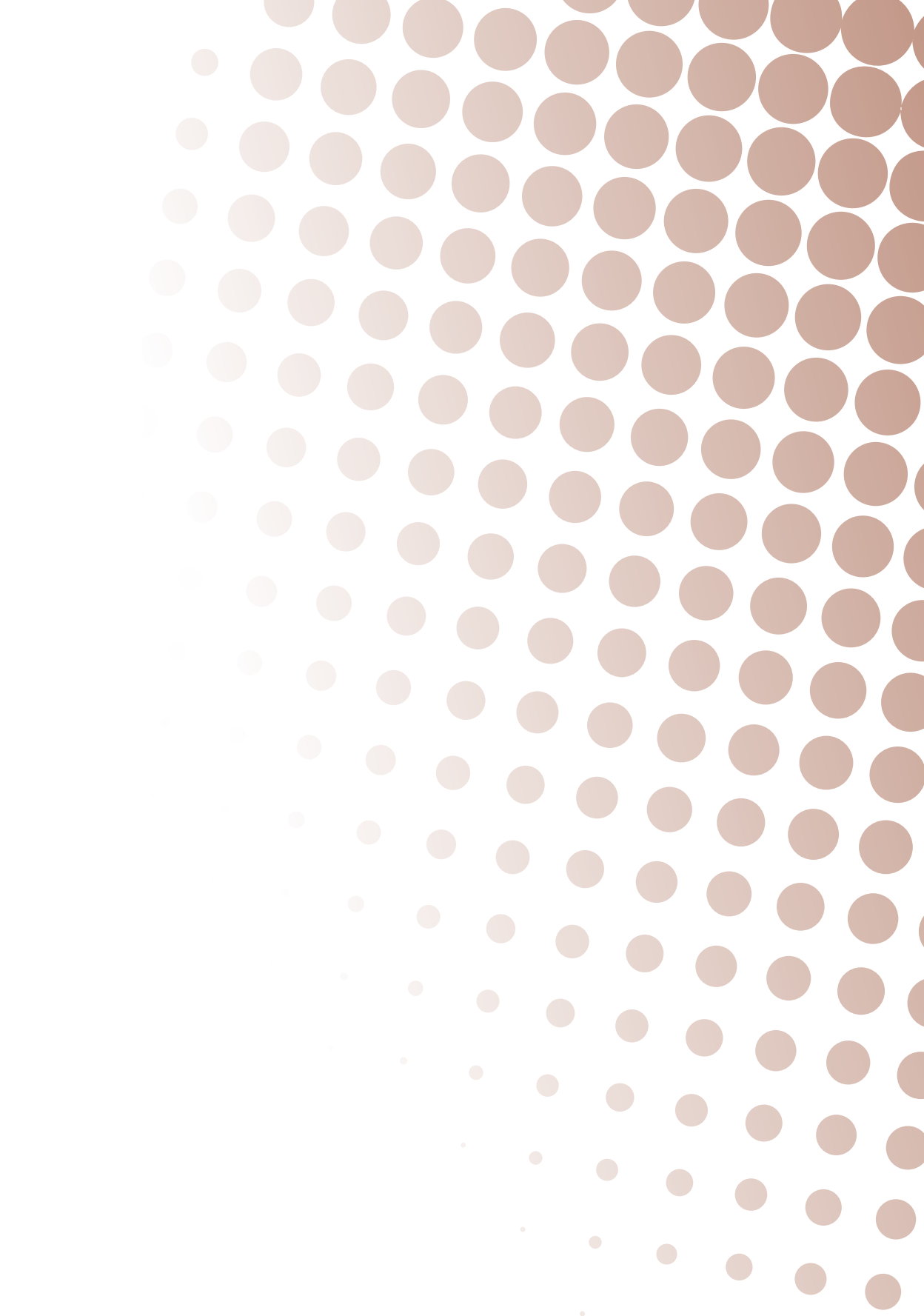
Every system has its life cycle. So have the world systems, including imperialism that had reached its peak in the form of the unipolar hegemonic transnational monopoly capitalism between the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the crisis of 2008. In 2009 the BRICS was formally founded. A new, multipolar world is still in the state of formation, but it will result in a global system that will be new in two senses. First, it will have a different, multicentric geopolitical structure and second, it will increase the variation of societies ranging from different types of capitalism and mixed economies to socialism-oriented regimes with national characteristics.

Multipolarity has arrived but it must be consolidated. Imperialists countries will not give in easily. To prevent the worst, a strong coalition of all other nations is needed.

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BANDUNG'S HERITAGE IN THE "NEW ERA" OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Gracjan Cimek¹

Abstract

The 21st century did not bring the expected international changes, and the diagnoses proposed by the Non-Aligned Movement are still relevant. Therefore, the Bandung ideas may also be able to solve contemporary problems in the security dimension. The aim of the article is, first of all, to characterize them; secondly, to show their relevance; thirdly, to analyse their presence in the activities of actors whom I refer to as representatives of the “new era” of international relations. As a result, I prove that Russia and China, as well as the BRICS group, refer to Bandung spirit. Moreover, the idea of “indivisible security” is a new aspect of their development. I demonstrate the usefulness of the relational-historical approach of studying security as a condition for identifying the essential causes of threats in its various dimensions and also verify the legitimacy of the law of retroactive subversion in international relations.

Keywords: *Bandung, new era, security, BRICS, Russia, China.*

1. Introduction

Security is a state and a characteristic of international relations as a specific form of social relations between nations and states on a global scale. The way it is conceptualized determines its implementation. International relations theories can be divided into those that solve problems, which accept the existing social order and try to improve it (e.g. neorealism or neoliberalism); and theories that do not accept the status quo, and therefore strive to change it (Cox, 1986, p. 204–254). The second group

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belongs to critical theories, covering a wide range of topics, including neo-Marxism, feminism, and historical sociology. From this perspective, a distinction can also be made between the deductive-reifying and the historical-relational approaches in security research. The former fits into the positivist paradigm of science, while the latter into interpretivist and critical realism.

In the deductive-reifying approach, the research area of international security studies is defined by the following criteria:

- the actor-structure criterion, according to which we distinguish between the security of participants (subjective approach) and the security of international structures (objective approach);
- the functional criterion (military, economic, cultural, ecological security);
- international security, which is a non-linear process and manifests itself in parallel in time and space on four levels: the human individual, the state (national security), the region (regional security), the international system (international security). These are integrally linked and form the international security system, which is the subject of international security studies (Halizak, 2017, p. 9-23).

The described ways of conceptualizing security seem to favour the methodological individualism present in the reification of the abstract individual, the abstract state, and the abstract levels of research. In this case, abstract means abstracting from sociohistorical matter.

Therefore, we prefer the second approach, which relates the ontology of international relations to the dynamics of the international system. International security is here a manifestation of the balance of power and interests, especially of the major powers, which supervenes at the regional, national and finally individual level in a specific historical context. The relational-historical approach takes into account those elements of critical theory that emphasize competing interests in power relations between groups and individuals identifying winners and losers; the development of self-awareness leading to increased autonomy of action and the use of acquired power to shape solidarity of communities pursuing principles of justice; recognizing the influence of economic factors on power relations, but not absolutizing them; rejecting instrumental rationality (philosophical pragmatism) focused on technique (in political and economic struggle) in favour of humanistic reflection on the purpose

of action, based on the inseparability of facts and values; This involves recognizing the principles of immanence, focusing on what could be. Criticism therefore leads to proposals for social change, rather than adaptation to accept the status quo. The study of hegemony as a cultural practice of institutions seeking to reproduce social divisions based on the profit-loss relationship. Recognizing in this aspect the role of language as a valuing element of the world's construction according to the will of dominant groups and states, as well as the instrumentalization of culture in its various manifestations (Kincheloe, McLaren, 2010, p. 431). In this view, the proper method of study is to move from the abstract to the concrete and back from concrete to abstract combining induction and deduction. The legacy of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries is part of the methodology of critical research referring to the historical-relational approach.

The research question of the article is: Are the Bandung ideas still relevant in the 21st century? Which international actors refer to them and why? Is the BRICS group a continuation of these ideas? The answers to these questions are structured in the article, which includes, in addition to the introduction, a description of the essence of the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement in the light of the narrative of the Indonesian President Sukarno; the reference of these ideas to international phenomena and processes in the 21st century; their presence in the narrative of international actors representing the “new era” of international relations; and a description of the idea of indivisible security. The last part, which summarizes the article, contains conclusions in the form of answers to the research questions posed and an indication of the legitimacy of the relational-historical and critical approach in the understanding of international processes and phenomena in the security dimension.

In order to solve the research problem, discourse analysis was carried out, which became the main instrument of qualitative methods in the study of the Bandung idea. The analysis focused on the statements of President Sukarno as their leading propagator, as well as the political declarations of BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China and Russia, including statements by politicians. The analysis of primary sources was supplemented by reference to reports, media information and scientific publications on the subject. On this basis, preliminary hypotheses were formulated. Based on the assumptions made, it was concluded that: first, BRICS is updating selected Bandung ideas on security issues; second, their presence is particularly evident in the attitudes of Russia and China; third, the idea of “indivisible security” is a const-

ructive development of the Bandung idea in the 21st century. In the article, I also verify the legitimacy of the law of retroactive subversion created by Kazimierz Kellez Krauz, which states: the ideals with which any reform movement seeks to replace existing social norms are always similar to norms from the more or less distant past (Kelles-Krauz, 1962, p. 250) with regard to international politics.

2. The essence of Pacha Shila according to President Sukarno

Opening the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Indonesian President Sukarno characterized the global reality during the first phase of the so-called Cold War by emphasizing "life-line of imperialism". "This line runs from the Straits of Gibraltar, through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Sea of Japan. For most of that enormous distance, the territories on both sides of this life-line were colonies, the peoples were unfree, their futures mortgaged to an alien system. Along that life-line, that main artery of imperialism, there was pumped the life-blood of colonialism". He also marked that „we are living in a world of fear. The life of man today is corroded and made bitter by fear. Fear of the future, fear of the hydrogen bomb, fear of ideologies. Perhaps this fear is a greater danger than the danger itself, because it is fear which drives man to act foolishly, to act dangerously". Sukarno named the cause as "modern dress" of colonialism in „the form of economic control, intellectual control, actual physical control by a small but alien community within a nation... Wherever, whenever, and however it appears, colonialism is an evil thing, and one which must be eradicated from the earth" (Abdulgani, 2020, p. 82-84).

His warning about this matter could be seen later on appearing in the joint communicate of all the participants in the Bandung Conference, which, in part D 1. a., declares that speedily be brought to an end. "Colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should with regard to the mutual connections between independence and peace". President Sukarno also emphasized in several parts of his opening address that the two were interdependent. Amongst other things, he said: "like peace, freedom is indivisible... peace was necessary for us, because an outbreak of fighting in our part of the world would imperil our precious independence... No task is more urgent than that of preserving peace. Without peace, our independence means little...".

This idea of President Sukarno's about the mutual ties and mutual relations between independence and peace can be seen again in the joint communique of the Bandung Conference in part G, first paragraph, in the sentence that later became known everywhere, that is, the sentence: "Freedom and peace are interdependent". This sentence precedes the *Dasasila Bandung* that is, the Ten Principles about efforts to promote peace and cooperation in the world at present, which, basically, perfect and strengthen the five principles of "peaceful co-existence". In the *Dasasila Bandung* the principle of self-defence is very clearly accepted, whether singly or collectively, in the bonds of a military agreement with a group of other countries, provided that this right of self-defence is not utilised for the special interests of one of the big powers. This new principle runs in full as follows: "Respect for the right of each nation to defend itself, singly or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations. Abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers" (Abdulgani, 2020, p. 84-85).

In his speech at the UN General Assembly on June 20, 1960, President Sukarno characterized the principles of "Building the world anew" by pointing out that this would only be possible after the fall of imperialism. He recognized it as the "greatest evil in the world", which still manifested itself in military expansion and new forms of economic exploitation. Without this process, the UN would not fulfil its role as a guarantor of world peace based on the cooperation of sovereign nations. At the same time, he rejected the bipolar division of the Cold War and proposed to base it on the principles of *Pancasila* (Sukarno 1960).

The first principle is based on the belief in transcendent values and the principle of religious tolerance, „we place Belief in God as the forefront of our philosophy of life. Even those who follow no God, in their innate tolerance, recognize that belief in the Almighty is characteristic of their nation". He further distinguished nationalism from chauvinism, stating that nationalism means identifying with one's own nation and desiring its well-being, which must lead to international cooperation because „there is no conflict or contradiction between nationalism and Internationalism. Indeed, Internationalism cannot grow and flourish except in the rich soil of nationalism. (...) Internationalism is most certainly not cosmopolitanism, which is a denial of nationalism, which is anti-national, and indeed, anti-reality" (...) fourthly, there is Democracy. Democracy is not the monopoly or the Invention of the Western social orders. Rather, democracy grows to the natural condition of men, although it is modified to fit

particular social conditions". The final rule is social justice. "With this, we link social prosperity, for we regard the two as inseparable. Indeed, only a prosperous society can be a just society, although prosperity itself can reside in social injustice" (Sukarno 1960). These ideas can be considered the core principles of Bandung.

3. The relevance of Bandung in the 21st century

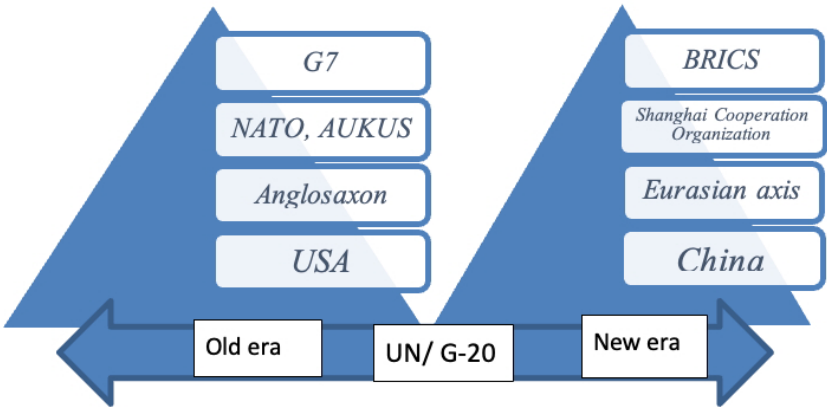
The 21st century did not bring the expected international changes, and Sukarno's diagnoses are being confirmed – again and again. Contrary to the hegemonic stability theory, which assumes that hegemony imposes an obligation to prevent violations of the principles of liberal economics and the behaviour of so-called free riders (independent actors), based on preventing the overexploitation of weaker states 21st-century practice shows the existence of "hegemonic rent". Currently, it takes the form of the coercion to purchase American weapons or maintain unnecessary dollar reserves. Furthermore, the defence of hegemony includes the possibility of changing the rules of the game (Petroni, 2024) and suspending market rules when it proves useful for victory, the most recent example being the shock doctrine of the end of globalization, announced on April 2, in the form of tariffs imposed on many countries by the US president on the basis that „access to the American market is a privilege, not a right" (Trump, 2025). The category of imperialism thus retains its explanatory value. It is filled with the artificial creation of geopolitical enemies and threats to keep people in a permanent state of fear; racism disguised under the slogans of "garden against the jungle", "order based on values", the division into "the West and the rest" (Ferguson, 2013); draining nations through the debt trap (OECD, 2025); struggle against the real democracy through liberal "priests" accusing nations of making bad choices (Applebaum, 2024).

The relational-historical approach emphasizes that all levels of security are being challenged in the 21st century: the concept of the "Great Reset" promoted by the transnational Davos class threatens the freedom and ontological security of the individual (Janowski, 2023–25); the security of the West Asian region is threatened by support for the illegal Syrian terrorist regime and plans to attack Iran; the organization of "colour revolutions" and disinformation campaigns threaten the national security of countries striving to maintain their sovereignty (e.g. Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia, Bel-

arus, Venezuela); finally, militarization legitimized by the concept of the “New Cold War” and the exaggerated Russian threat jeopardizes international security.

In the 1960s the president of Indonesia, who proposed at the first time the word “emerging” in global geopolitics. According to him, the world was polarised between NEFOS (New Emerging Forces) and OLDEFOS (Old Established Forces). In his words “New Emerging Forces are gigantic forces consisting of progressive nations and groups willing to build a New World full of justice and friendship among the nations, a New World full of peace and well-beings, a New World without imperialism, colonialism and exploitation” (Khudori, 2018, p. 4-5). In the 21st century, this division needs to be reconstructed, which is reflected in the proposal of two types of actors: the “old era” and the “new era” of international relations. The structure of their rivalry is presented in the visualization below.

Figure 1: Competition between actors of the ‘old era’ and ‘new era’ of international relations



Source: The author's own work.

Let us now consider to what extent the activities of the actors representing the “new era” are updating the ideas of Bandung. We will especially focus on BRICS, which reveals ambitions reveal a desire for fair globalization, universally beneficial and based on cooperation and economic integration. At the 2024 Kazan Summit, the leaders announced the strengthening of a strategic partnership based on the values of mutual respect and understanding, sovereign equality, solidarity, democracy, openness, inclusiveness, cooperation and consensus. Even though it is referred to as a „mechanism”,

„a platform” or „a club”, essentially, we should call it as an inter-civilizational association of states for a “new era” of international relations (Wang & Long, 2024).

4. Security issue in the BRICS group

The BRICS have never positioned themselves as an independent international security institution with its own goals and objectives, isolated from the rest of the world. The group has taken on an intermediary role in finding solutions to major international problems. The UN was given a key role, as stated in all the final documents of the BRICS summits, including the first joint statement of the BRIC countries in 2009.

It seems that China and Russia are the countries that most closely follow the spirit of Bandung, unlike India, which pursues the concept of strategic autonomy (Zajaczkowski, 2024, p. 289-320). Sergey Ryabkov, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, stated: “Today, BRICS is seen as one of the pillars of a new, fairer world order that aims to provide all countries with equal opportunities, to free the countries of the Global South and the Global East from the role of obedient suppliers of cheap labour and raw materials which is imposed on them by the West, and to consolidate the right of all nations to maintain their own identity, self-determination, independent domestic and foreign policies, and the protection of traditional values.” What sets BRICS apart from other platforms is its ability to build an equal dialogue (Сегодня БРИКС, 2023). Beijing, on the other hand, is actively promoting the concept of a common destiny for humanity, which was first expressed at MGIMO University during a speech by Xi Jinping on March 23, 2013. The Chinese approach assumes that the modern world is different from previous eras: humanity cannot now compete, but only cooperate (Arov, 2024, p. 45). The concept of a shared human destiny means that the international community needs to be consolidated in order to solve global problems (Zhang, 2024, 517-540). This clear reference to the Bandung idea is in contrast to the concept of exclusivity of the Western capitalist powers concentrated in the G7 (Yeshi, 2025). However, the Russian and Chinese narratives do not monopolize the BRICS agenda, especially after the group's expansion in 2023-24. Notable consolidation of BRICS value priorities between 2022 and 2024 within the established framework of the “BRICS spirit” in core encompasses such as: mutual respect, mutual understanding, sovereign equality, solidarity, openness, inclusiveness, consensus, strengthening

collaboration, and democracy. These principles continue to crystallise in 2023–2024, and finally included: strengthening peace, establishing a more inclusive and fair international order, reforming the multilateral system, upholding the rule of international law in its interconnectedness, and promoting sustainable development and inclusive growth. Among the group's common goals, security was present only at six summits, and at the two in the context of the vision of a desired future (Barabanov. 2025, p. 3-7).

Since the first meetings of the BRIC leaders, the parties have been able to agree on common positions on international security issues, developing and agreeing on joint or close approaches to countering international terrorism and drug trafficking, cooperating in the interest of ensuring international information security, combating maritime piracy and illegal migration (Старчак, 2014). At the same time, the BRICS security agenda is expanding to include regional conflicts and possibilities for their resolution, issues of counter-terrorism and threats in the information space, the militarization of outer space, the Iranian nuclear program, the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, new challenges and threats, the creation and use of information and communication technologies, issues of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, arms control, etc. There are specialized working groups: on the fight against terrorism; on the safe use of information and communication technologies. High-level representatives of the BRICS countries responsible for security issues meet annually. In addition, in 2020, the BRICS counter-terrorism strategy was adopted under Russian leadership (Arov, 2024).

The significant increase in the importance of security issues has been evident over the past two years. Concluding the 16th summit in 2023 The 43-page Kazan Declaration, entitled “Strengthening Multilateralism for Fair Global Development and Security” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2024), contains 134 points outlining the group's aim to reform global institutions, strengthen cooperation and respond jointly to global crises. The dimension concerning “Strengthening cooperation for global and regional stability and security” includes 23 points concerning a wide range of phenomena in the international system. In this part, the declaration includes statements on various international conflicts and problems, usually treated in a general way with ambiguous terms, e.g. we emphasize, we remind, we are concerned, we call upon, we confirm, we reiterate. In this way, a broad consensus among the participants of the meeting is achieved.

To a large extent, content of Kazan Declaration is based on the findings of the Joint Statement of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, which took place in Nizhny Novgorod on June 10, 2024 (Joint, 2024). And the 14th Meeting of BRICS National Security Advisors and High Representatives for National Security. It is worth noting that the latter meeting was attended by representatives from Indonesia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Thailand, Belarus, Vietnam, Venezuela, Uzbekistan, Nicaragua, Cuba, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mauritania and Laos. Ali Akbar Ahmadian, Secretary General of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), proposed the creation of a "special security structure for BRICS called the 'BRICS Security Commission' that can help create a new global security structure (Ira, 2024). This call was not met by the declaration and therefore remains in the realm of potential policy.

According to the declaration, tolerance and peaceful coexistence are among the most important values and principles in relations between nations and societies, hence the need for peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomacy, mediation, pluralistic dialogue and consultation (points 25–26), which refers to the principles of *Pancasila*, and thus directly refers to the idea of Bandung. Therefore, BRICS' approach to security is based on the principles of inclusiveness and one indivisible security for all, respect for international law, as opposed to the idea of a "world based on principles" (read: their principles) promoted by the West.

Among the conflicts discussed, the most prominent is the criticism of the humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories caused by the "unprecedented escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as a result of the Israeli military offensive, which led to mass killings and injuries among the civilian population, forced displacements and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure" (para. 30). Israeli attacks on humanitarian operations, facilities, UN personnel and humanitarian aid distribution points were also condemned. From the perspective of global solidarity and justice, the Kazan Declaration's support for the International Court of Justice in the lawsuit filed by South Africa against Israel is an important element. The fact that the BRICS countries have taken the initiative against Israeli practices against the occupied Palestinians is a telling confirmation of the difference between the Old and New Eras. Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandela, grandson of Nelson Mandela, referring to the support of China and Russia for the fight against apartheid supported by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, pointed out that the BRICS'

quest to overthrow the unipolar hegemony is reminiscent of the anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles of the 20th century. He emphasized that South Africa is once again playing a key role in this (BRICS Bloc, 2024). It is worth noting that on November 21, 2024, the International Criminal Court in The Hague issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Yohav Galant, and Hamas commander Mohammed Deif, accusing them of war crimes and crimes against humanity in connection with the war in the Gaza Strip and Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. The declaration also condemned Israel's attacks on Lebanon and its violation of the country's sovereignty, in particular "the premeditated terrorist act of detonating hand-held communication devices in Beirut on September 17, 2024, which caused the death and injury of dozens of civilians". With the condemnation of the attack on the diplomatic headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Syrian capital Damascus by Israel on April 1, 2024, the BRICS geopolitical code clearly tends to recognize Israel as a terrorist state, even though this contrasts with the bilateral relations of some countries.

The Yemeni Ansallah movement, which has started to actively fight Israel in response to its behaviour in Palestine after 7.10.2023, has been treated differently. The most spectacular is the destruction of merchant ships accused of favouring Israel with rockets. BRICS "emphasizes the importance of ensuring the exercise of the rights and freedoms of navigation by ships of all states in the Red Sea and the Bab Al-Mandab Strait, in accordance with international law" (para. 33) without condemning the Yemeni soldiers who became the target of US-UK and Israeli attacks and thus fall within the sphere of influence of the counter-hegemonic powers.

The Ukrainian problem was similarly addressed, revealing a neutral stance towards Russia's war with Ukraine and rejecting Western attempts to isolate Moscow internationally. The national positions of the group participants regarding the situation in and around Ukraine were "recalled", emphasizing that all states should act in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in their entirety and in their interrelationship. Behind these statements is the suggestion regarding the role of Western powers in the escalation of this crisis in 2014. It was important to note the mediation and good offices aimed at a peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy, as the BRICS countries were involved. South Africa, China together with Brazil, and then India. Of course, there is no unity in the interpretation of the Russian intervention in Ukraine. For example, In-

dia not only sent its representative to Switzerland for the conference on Ukraine, to which Russia was not invited and China refused to participate. India also accepted the invitation to the G7 summit, which took place from June 13–15 in Brindisi, Italy. However, it is worth emphasizing that India did not sign the final document at the Swiss conference (similarly to the BRICS countries, which were mainly represented by politicians and diplomats from below the top level).

Another example of the reference to Bandung was the emphasis on the principle of “African solutions for African problems” and the key role of the African Union were emphasized against neocolonialism. It is worth noting that a number of countries in the region are members of the group: South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Nigeria and Uganda have become partners. The de-dollarization promoted by the BRICS, i.e. the reduction of dependence on the US dollar in international trade, can benefit African countries by strengthening their economic autonomy and reducing the impact of exchange rate fluctuations on trade and investment. African countries can gain new financial tools to balance Western-dominated financial structures. For countries struggling with debt and high import costs, new opportunities are emerging to address macroeconomic problems., and, in practice, freeing people from the neocolonial debt trap.

The BRICS declaration supports Afghanistan as an independent, united and peaceful state free of terrorism, war and drugs. Afghanistan's efforts to participate in the summit in 2024 were not accepted, which does not rule out such a possibility in the future. It is probably a question of meeting certain conditions, including those indicated in the declaration “to protect the fundamental rights of all Afghans, including women, girls and various ethnic groups. We call on the Afghan authorities to lift the effective ban on secondary and higher education for girls” (para. 42).

Another example of the rejection of the Western narrative in the security sphere was the “unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, whenever, wherever and by whomever committed, while reaffirming that it should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group” (p. 47). To this end, the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group (CTWG) and its five subgroups are developing the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Action Plan. It is worth mentioning that on July 23, 2024, thanks to China, an agreement was signed by 14 different Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, the so-called “Beijing Declaration”, officially: Beijing Declaration

on Ending the Division and Strengthening the National Unity of Palestine. This is an important Chinese support for the reconciliation process between the two factions in the internal conflict in order to strengthen their national liberation struggle. During his visit to Moscow, the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) Mahmoud Abbas not only received support for Palestine's full membership in the United Nations and the two-state solution, but above all the prospect of joining BRICS.

5. Indivisible security in the “new era” of the international system

President Sukarno emphasized the indivisibility of the principles of sovereignty and peace. It seems that the idea of indivisible security, which means, that no country or coalition would take decisions deemed by other countries to be a threat to their security interests. The principle was mentioned in the preamble to the Helsinki Final Act of the CSCE, and then repeated and expanded in the Paris Charter for a New Europe and subsequent OSCE documents. It primarily amounts to recognising the inseparable relationship between the security of each state in the OSCE area and their equal right to security. The idea lost its functionality, especially in the perception of the West, when a new balance of power emerged after the fall of the USSR. Therefore, Russia made attempts to reinstate it. In the 2009 proposed a treaty on European security (the Medvedev Initiative) and the draft agreements presented to the U.S. and NATO in December 2021 all emphasise this principle. However, the concept was ignored by the Collective West claiming a monopoly on defining security, which favoured NATO's expansion eastward rejecting Russian concerns (Kulesza, 2022). Therefore, three weeks before the start of the intervention in Ukraine the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov in the letter sent to a number of OSCE participating states, called on them to clarify their position with regards to the fulfilment of OSCE obligations, in particular their interpretation of the principle of the indivisibility of security (Text, 2022). In the absence of a response, the war with Ukraine began in February. The “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” of 2023 upheld the will to implement the indivisibility of international security (on a global and regional scale), thus ensuring it equally for every state, based on the principle of reciprocity (Указ, 2023).

The indivisible security is an important principle of China's Global Security Initiative. This concept has gone through four stages of development: indivisibility of peace, indivisibility of European security, indivisibility of Russia – Atlantic security, and indivisibility of global security. Theoretically, it advocates the indivisibility of inter-subjective security, the indivisibility of Security Risk Complex, and the indivisibility of a global security society. Practically, it advocates the indivisibility between individual security and common security, between traditional security and non-traditional security, between security rights and security obligations, and between security and development. The Global Security Initiative is based on a balanced, effective, and sustainable security architecture aimed at promoting the indivisible and universal security for the international community through threat-driven, interest-driven, and identity-driven approaches (Implementing, 2024).

It is worth to add the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit's principles also highlight that national security demands are indivisible and that security and development are intertwined. The Astana Declaration has clarified that its members: „consider it unacceptable to try to ensure their own security at the expense of the security of other states” (Astana, 2024). This is fundamentally different from NATO's concept of indivisible security, which is based on building an alliance against external enemies, while SCO to ensure the political stability, economic and social development of its member states (Yun, 2024). Therefore, the concept of exclusive Euro-Atlantic security is in conflict with „promote interaction in building a new type of international relations in the spirit of mutual respect, justice, equality and mutually beneficial cooperation, as well as the formation of a common vision of the idea of creating a community with a common destiny for humanity and developing dialogue on the idea “One Earth. One family. One future” (Astana, 2024).

6. Conclusions

The Bandung ideas emerged during the growing contradictions of the Yalta-Potsdam order. The growing desire for the empowerment of the so-called Third World countries met with a corresponding geopolitical upturn and gained support in the socialist camp. Furthermore, the ideas promoted by Sukarno revealed a greater scope of universalism than the concepts of Western liberalism and Soviet Marxism, which were based on the Eurocentric Enlightenment paradigm. Their universalism is proved by

the fact that the criticized international processes and phenomena are still present in the 21st century: waging imperial wars, using economic sanctions as a weapon and the narrative of Western domination; undermining national sovereignty, the hypertrophy of fear with the help of corporate media.

In answer to the question about the relevance of the *Pancasila*, it should be pointed out that the BRICS values refer to the idea of faith in Almighty God, who has different names in different religions and nations. Nationalism and internationalism serve new economic solutions aimed at achieving social development and prosperity. The Bandung ideas are thus finding new realization in the 21st century. In this way, the law of subversive retrospection is confirmed in international relations.

The decline of the hegemony of the United States and the economic dominance of the Collective West also means the rebirth of powers striving for a “new era” of international relations, which refer to Bandung. Both China and Russia have abandoned Eurocentric thinking and promoted the ideas of indivisible security, dialogue among civilizations, mutual respect and the defence of sovereignty, as advocated by the Non-Aligned Movement. The awareness of weaker states has increased and the desire for empowerment has become a universal trend, favouring the universal message contained in the Bandung legacy. Indonesia’s accession to BRICS at the beginning of 2025 as the first Southeast Asian representative creates opportunities to strengthen the reception of the idea of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In this process, the BRICS play a special role, with ten countries and nine partners already belonging to it, together accounting for more than half of the world’s population. Emerging differences of interest are being regulated in a new, albeit informal, structure. For Brazil, India and South Africa, the problem of East-West confrontation is not as fundamental as it is for Russia and China. Territorial and political disputes between the BRICS countries should also be kept in mind, as they may increase with the expansion of the association. It is precisely the reference to the Bandung idea that increases the chances of achieving a new harmony of interests based on compromise. After the last summit, China and India began de-escalating on the border in search of mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Although Iran is seen as a strategic opponent in the region by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Chinese diplomacy has led to an improvement in relations between the two countries. Finally, diplomatic ties between Egypt and Iran are on the way of rebuilding. However, the

conflict between Iran and Israel, as well as Ethiopia and Egypt, will be a real test for BRICS in the security dimension.

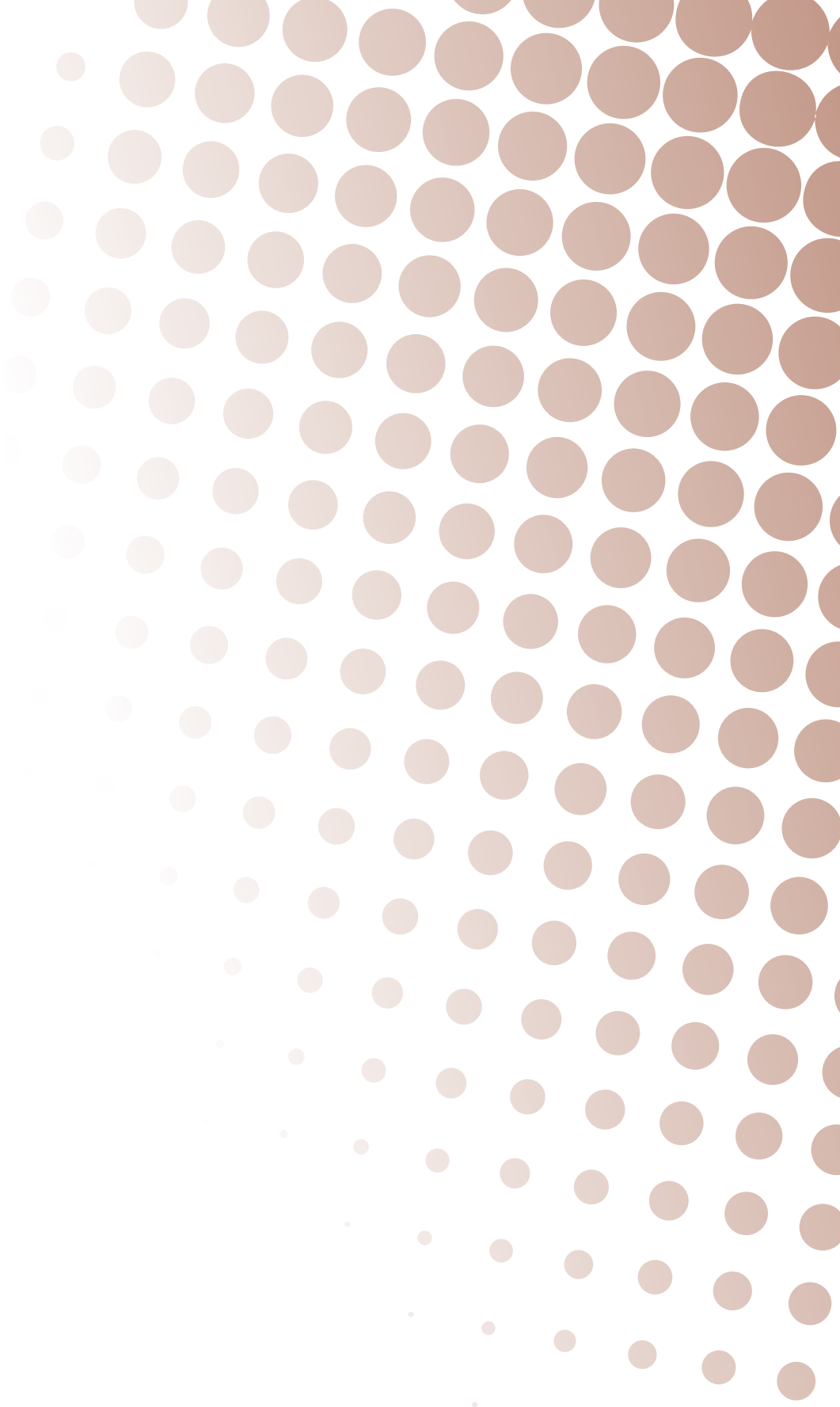
The competition to shape the multipolar world of the 21st century reveals that the hitherto dominant actors of the 'old era' have no intention of supporting either the idea or the practice of weakening their existing advantages and the benefits of enforcing hegemonic rent. This is the most important challenge of the 21st century, which the deductive-reifying approach to security is unable to show. It is limited to presenting selected, observed phenomena, depriving research of the need to search for the essence among intentional causes. In defence of the "old era" of international relations, the primary intentional cause is the ambition of strong capitalist powers over the past five hundred years to guarantee their own security without regard to the interests and security of weaker states. Therefore, the actors of a "new era", creatively developing the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement, promote the idea of "indivisible security" corresponding to the principles of peace, sovereignty and social development.

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BANDUNG, BRICS, AND MIKTA: COMPETING VISIONS OF SOUTHERN MULTILATERALISM?

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Abstract

The main points of the paper concern the Bandung Conference's enduring legacy as a normative framework in international relations, particularly for Global South countries. It emphasises principles such as peaceful coexistence, sovereignty, and mutual respect, which continue to influence regional institutions like ASEAN and BRICS. The paper critiques the disconnect between official rhetoric celebrating the Bandung Spirit and the lack of grassroots engagement and public debate in foreign policy. It highlights the need for South-South solidarity and reform in North-South relations, while acknowledging the challenges posed by elite-driven foreign policies that often sideline civil society and youth. Ultimately, it argues for a revitalisation of the Bandung Spirit as a transformative movement rather than merely a historical reference.

Keywords: *Bandung Conference, BRICS, MIKTA, multilateralism, Non-Aligned Movement, Global South*

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1. Introduction

The 70th anniversary of the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 2025 arrives with relatively muted fanfare, far from the grand commemorations seen during the SBY administration's 50th anniversary or President Jokowi's 60th anniversary, when global leaders gathered in Bandung and retraced the iconic historical walk.

Under President Prabowo, a new approach is proposed. Rather than investing political capital in romanticizing the past, Prabowo's foreign policy seems to prioritise strategic pragmatism and national interest, likely driven by the understanding that today's global order is no longer defined by Cold War-era binaries but by an increasingly multipolar world. The Bandung Spirit, rooted in ideals of solidarity, independence, anti-colonialism, and non-alignment, played a critical role in mobilizing formerly colonized nations to assert their sovereignty. Its legacy helped establish a post-colonial identity for Asia and Africa, giving rise to a wave of political liberation movements. However, after decades of independence, many of the countries that were once united under the banner of Bandung still struggle with underdevelopment, structural inequality, and marginalization in global governance and even its labelled as discomfort South (Sud & Sanchez-Anchochea, 2022).

The Spirit of Bandung, born out of the 1955 Asian-African Conference, was a powerful rallying call against colonialism, imperialism, and racial subjugation. It inspired a wave of decolonization across Asia and Africa (Umar, Yuana, Hakim, & Mas'ood, 2025), as nations gained political independence and asserted their sovereignty on the global stage. The conference laid the ideological foundation for postcolonial solidarity and non-alignment, enabling many member countries to break free from direct colonial rule. However, while the Bandung Spirit succeeded in achieving political liberation for much of the Global South, the current global landscape reveals a new form of inequality, economic dependence and marginalization in international decision-making.

Today, most of the countries that once gathered under the Bandung banner remain classified as least-developed or developing nations (Biswas, 2018), struggling with poverty, debt, infrastructure gaps, and limited technological capacity. These structural challenges prevent them from standing on equal footing with the developed world, particularly the G7 nations, which continue to dominate global governance insti-

tutions, trade networks, and financial systems. Therefore, the Bandung movement needs a renewal, not in the form of reliving historical symbolism, but by transforming its moral legacy into concrete strategies for economic development, digital transformation, and diplomatic parity. The new frontier of liberation is no longer just about sovereignty from foreign rule, but about closing the development gap and securing a meaningful voice in shaping global norms.

Crucially, unresolved historical injustices such as the occupation of Palestine continue to underscore the original mission of the Bandung Spirit (Castillo, 2025). The plight of the Palestinian people, who have yet to achieve independence and continue to face systemic occupation, serves as a painful reminder that the struggle against colonialism and domination is not yet complete. Yet beyond this, the most visible and urgent challenges today for many countries in Asia and Africa are related to development inequality and underrepresentation in global diplomacy. These nations are increasingly focused on asserting their national interests, investing in infrastructure, education, technology, and regional partnerships, not as isolated efforts, but as part of a broader ambition to build collective power and shape a more just, balanced international order. By doing so, they aim to redefine their position from passive recipients of global norms to active contributors, ensuring that international interactions are no longer dominated by one or two powers, but reflect the true diversity and complexity of the global South.

In an era marked by intensifying global power rivalries, middle and emerging powers are facing increasing pressure to take sides. This polarization has created a complex international environment where non-major powers must navigate their foreign policy choices carefully (Kassimeris, 2008), often balancing between competing alliances, economic dependencies, and strategic interests. The resurgence of great power competition has also been accompanied by structural shifts in global governance, including the growing influence of coalitions like BRICS+, which challenge the Western-dominated international order. Within this context, the relevance and future direction of the Bandung Spirit, once a symbol of non-alignment, South-South solidarity, and postcolonial autonomy, remains uncertain. The ideals of Bandung are being tested by contemporary realities, where neutrality and non-alignment are increasingly difficult to sustain amid deepening global divisions and regional conflicts. This raises critical questions about how countries in the Global South can reimagine or renew the Bandung legacy in an age of multipolar rivalry and contested global norms. This is also

why the Bandung spirit has yet to reveal its future direction, given the ongoing major power rivalry and the dynamics of conflicts occurring in various regions.

What these nations now need is not only political freedom but economic empowerment, technological advancement, and diplomatic equity. While the Bandung Spirit provided a powerful moral compass in the mid-20th century, today's challenges require more than shared historical experience, they demand coordinated strategy, institutional reform, and economic leverage. In this context, the BRICS movement, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, embodies a new form of cooperation among emerging powers. It is grounded not in ideological solidarity but in strategic and pragmatic coordination, aimed at reshaping global institutions, fostering South-South economic ties, and asserting collective influence. Another movement is MIKTA, consisting Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia that is shaped by the common interest in reforming UN Security Council and has good informal relations in G20 forum. Interestingly, several BRICS and MIKTA countries, such as India, South Africa, and Indonesia, were also key participants in the Bandung Conference, creating a symbolic and practical bridge between the three initiatives.

While the Bandung Spirit emphasized political unity and decolonization, BRICS and MIKTA focus on recalibrating global power structures through alternative financial systems, development cooperation, global governance reformation and multipolar diplomacy. Yet both share a core aspiration: to transform a global order that remains dominated by a few. For emerging powers like Indonesia, the path forward must synthesize the moral clarity of Bandung with the strategic ambition of BRICS. Rather than seeing them in opposition, these three movements should be understood as complementary, Bandung providing the ethical foundation, BRICS offering the structural tools and MIKTA presenting new spirit of reformation. To navigate an increasingly complex world, emerging powers must draw from both traditions to build foreign policy strategies that are principled yet adaptive, cooperative yet assertive. In doing so, the Global South can move from the margins of international relations to its centre, not just as witnesses to global change, but as architects of it.

2. Bandung and the Non-Aligned Movement: Historical Foundations

The 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, remains one of the most significant diplomatic moments in the twentieth century, particularly for postcolonial states emerging from colonial and imperial system. This part in particular, explores interlinked dimensions of actors and context significance of the Bandung Spirit, foundational principles, the institutional trajectory, and rise and decline of NAM in the Cold War and post-Cold War periods.

2.1. The 1955 Bandung Conference: Context, Actors, and Significance

Held from April 18 to 24, 1955, in Bandung, Indonesia, the Asian-African Conference was unprecedented in scale, ambition, and symbolism. Organized by five key states – Indonesia, India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Pakistan, and Burma (Myanmar) – the conference brought together leaders from twenty-nine nations representing over half the world's population. These states, predominantly from Asia and Africa, had recently emerged from colonial rule or were still struggling for independence. While their internal politics varied, they were united by shared experiences of imperialism and a common interest in resisting Cold War polarization.

The political atmosphere of the time was defined by the bipolar tensions of the Cold War, decolonization struggles, and economic dependency on former colonial powers. The conference was explicitly non-aligned, rejecting subservience to either the United States or the Soviet Union. Major figures like Jawaharlal Nehru (India), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Zhou Enlai (China), and President Sukarno (Indonesia) used the conference to voice aspirations for a just, peaceful, and equitable international order.

As Amitav Acharya notes, the conference was not only a diplomatic event but a performative act of international political agency by the Global South. It challenged prevailing Western-centric international relations narratives and proposed an alternative vision of world order rooted in anti-imperialism, solidarity, and mutual respect. The significance of Bandung lay in its ability to articulate a postcolonial internationalism that foregrounded the lived experiences of formerly colonized peoples experiences often marginalized in mainstream international politics (Acharya, 2016).

Volker Matthies observes that Bandung was “an expression of anti-colonial Afro-Asian nationalism” that directly confronted racial hierarchies and structural inequalities in the global system. The presence of charismatic leaders and the convergence of divergent ideologies around a shared agenda of sovereignty and independence made Bandung a symbolic beginning of the “Third World” as a political force (Matthies, 1985).

2.2. Foundational Principles: Sovereignty, Equality, Anti-Imperialism

The Bandung Conference culminated in a communiqué that outlined ten principles of international conduct – often referred to as the “Bandung Principles.” These included: respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-intervention in internal affairs, equality among nations large and small, peaceful settlement of disputes, promotion of mutual interests, and cooperation for development.

These principles were not abstract ideals but grounded responses to the realities of colonial domination, economic subjugation, and the threat of Cold War militarism. Principle 6(a), for example, explicitly called for abstention from collective defence agreements serving the interests of great powers – an implicit critique of Cold War military pacts like SEATO and the Baghdad Pact (Shilliam, 2011).

What Bandung accomplished was the codification of a “postcolonial international normativity” – a set of ethical and political standards challenging the dominance of Western liberal or realist paradigms in international relations. As Acharya argues, the conference advanced a “relational and pluralistic” conception of order grounded in mutual respect, cultural diversity, and the recognition of historical injustice (Acharya, 2014).

Moreover, Bandung was not isolationist. While it criticized neocolonial economic structures, it called for cooperation with industrialized nations based on equality and mutual benefit. It emphasized the need for South-South solidarity while also advocating reform of North-South economic relations. In this sense, Bandung was both radical and pragmatic.

Nonetheless, internal contradictions persisted. The Afro-Asian bloc included states with divergent foreign policy orientations: some allied with the West (Pakistan, Thailand), others with the Soviet bloc (North Vietnam), and still others that pursued

non-alignment (India, Indonesia, Egypt). Additionally, states like Israel and South Africa were excluded on political grounds, raising questions about inclusivity and ideological coherence.

2.3. From Bandung to the Non-Aligned Movement: Institutionalizing Solidarity

Although the Bandung Conference did not result in permanent institutional structures, it laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. The NAM was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, through the efforts of Tito, Nehru, Nasser, Sukarno, and Kwame Nkrumah. It formalized Bandung's vision into a coordinated political platform committed to peace, disarmament, anti-imperialism, and economic development outside the confines of Cold War bipolarity. As Matthies explains, NAM was not merely a political club; it was a vehicle for projecting the moral and strategic agency of the Global South in a world dominated by superpowers (Matthies, 1985). It expanded its focus beyond political non-alignment to include demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), redistribution of wealth, debt relief, and South-South cooperation. In the 1970s, NAM worked closely with the Group of 77 (G77) within the UN system to push for economic reforms.

Acharya emphasizes that NAM institutionalized the Bandung spirit by embedding it in multilateral forums, especially within the UN General Assembly and UNCTAD (Acharya, 2016). While the Bandung Conference was a diplomatic rupture, NAM was its organizational consolidation. It became a conduit for collective bargaining, norm-setting, and symbolic resistance against the hegemony of powerful states and institutions.

Furthermore, NAM enabled previously marginalized states to express dissenting views on international security, nuclear proliferation, and development strategies. It provided space for small and medium powers to resist “bloc logic” and assert alternative visions of world order. Its commitment to sovereignty and non-intervention helped shield states from superpower manipulation, at least rhetorically.

2.4. Peak and Decline of the Non-Aligned Movement

The influence of NAM peaked during the 1970s and early 1980s. At the height of the Cold War, NAM was able to assert itself as a third force in global politics. Its summits attracted global attention; its resolutions shaped debates on disarmament, Palestine, apartheid, and economic justice. The movement projected a unified front in resisting neocolonial practices and championing the interests of developing nations.

However, cracks soon began to appear. The economic and political heterogeneity of its members made cohesive action difficult. The Iran-Iraq War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and internal coups in member states revealed deep ideological and strategic divergences. Some NAM members, like Cuba, increasingly aligned with the Soviet Union, undermining the principle of non-alignment itself.

With the end of the Cold War, NAM faced an existential crisis. The disappearance of the bipolar global order removed its primary strategic rationale. Formerly aligned and non-aligned states alike sought integration into the global capitalist economy, often through Western-led institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and WTO (Hurrell, 2010).

Matthies notes that by the 1985 anniversary of the Bandung Conference, the symbolic power of the movement remained, but its political vitality had waned. Few heads of state attended the commemoration; the event was more nostalgic than strategic (Matthies, 1985).

Yet the “spirit of Bandung” persisted in less institutionalized forms. It influenced South-South cooperation initiatives, regional blocs like the African Union and ASEAN, and the foreign policies of states like Indonesia, India, and South Africa. While NAM no longer set the global agenda, it had irrevocably changed the terms of global engagement. As Acharya observes, Bandung and its successors forced the world to reckon with voices previously ignored in the halls of power (Acharya, 2016).

3. The Current Geopolitical Landscape: Fragmentation and Opportunity

The international system is undergoing a profound transformation. The certainties of the post-Cold War unipolar moment, in which the United States stood as the uncontested global hegemon, have given way to a more fragmented, uncertain, and contested global order. This change is marked by three interlinked dynamics: the rise of multipolarity and the decline of U.S. unipolar dominance; the increasingly complex pressures faced by the Global South in navigating great power rivalries and global crises; and the deepening crisis of multilateralism as traditional institutions falter under the weight of new demands and competing norms. Drawing on insights from Mazarr (2022), Medeiros (2021), and Brender (2025), this essay explores these three developments and their implications for the future of international politics.

3.1. Multipolar Shifts: Decline of Unipolarity and the Emergence of Strategic Rivals

The end of the Cold War ushered in a period of U.S. unipolar dominance. However, the geopolitical landscape of the 2020s reveals a significant transformation. While the United States remains a major power with unparalleled military capabilities and a network of alliances, its relative dominance is increasingly challenged by the rise of China, the reassertion of Russia, and the growing influence of regional powers such as India, Brazil, and Turkey (Chin, & Thakur, 2010).

As Mazarr (2022) argues, the notion of “great power competition” has become a dominant frame in U.S. strategic thinking. This framing, however, often oversimplifies the reality of contemporary global politics. Rather than returning to a classic multipolar balance-of-power system, the world today exhibits a “hybrid” configuration that blends unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar elements. While the U.S. retains unmatched global military reach, China’s economic power, technological innovation, and regional assertiveness have positioned it as a systemic rival (Hameiri, & Jones, 2016). Russia, though economically weaker, continues to assert itself militarily and diplomatically, particularly in its near abroad and in conflict zones such as Syria and Ukraine.

This hybrid configuration complicates strategic decision-making. Medeiros (2021) emphasizes that contemporary competition is not simply about military might or

territorial control but about the projection of influence across economic, political, and ideological domains. China’s ambition, for example, lies not in replicating the U.S. model but in offering an alternative rooted in state-led capitalism, authoritarian governance, and infrastructure diplomacy. In East Asia, the United States and China pursue fundamentally incompatible visions for regional order. The U.S. seeks open access and the maintenance of alliances, while China aims to marginalize U.S. influence and assert its veto over regional decisions (Chin, & Thakur, 2010).

At the same time, the rise of regional actors and groupings such as BRICS, ASEAN, and the African Union further diversifies the global landscape. These actors do not necessarily seek to replace U.S. leadership but demand a more equitable distribution of power and influence. As Brender (2025) notes, countries in the Global South – many of which are part of these regional blocs – are asserting their preferences through strategic multi-alignment and demands for institutional reform.

3.2. The Global South Under Pressure: Alignments, Dependencies, and Agency

The reconfiguration of global power has profound implications for the Global South. Historically marginalized in the post-World War II international order, countries of the Global South now find themselves both courted and constrained by the dynamics of great power rivalry, global crises, and institutional inertia. As Brender outlines, the term “Global South” is less a geographical descriptor than a political construct shaped by shared histories of colonialism, developmental marginalization, and structural inequality.

Several interrelated pressures now confront the Global South. First, the intensification of strategic competition has placed many states in difficult positions regarding security alignments. For instance, India’s partnerships span Russia (arms), the United States (strategic cooperation), and regional actors, illustrating the strategic balancing act required in a multipolar world. In Africa, security partnerships with Russia, such as in Mali and the Central African Republic, present both opportunities and risks amid the retreat of Western military presence.

Second, economic dependency and infrastructure-driven diplomacy – most notably through China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – are reshaping development patterns and sovereignty dynamics. Since 2013, China has invested over \$100 billion

in African infrastructure, often using Chinese technology and labour. While these investments address real development needs, they also create long-term dependencies and raise questions about governance, debt sustainability, and strategic alignment (Hameiri, & Jones, 2016).

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of Global South countries to vaccine nationalism and unequal access to public goods. Despite rhetorical commitments to global solidarity, many Western powers prioritized their own populations and only offered vaccines to the South after domestic needs were met. In contrast, China and India deployed “vaccine diplomacy” early, using it as a tool of soft power (Dhillon, 2023). Such experiences have led to increased scepticism toward Western commitments and a search for more diversified partnerships.

Fourth, the climate finance agenda illustrates the enduring asymmetry in international commitments. Global South countries, many of which are disproportionately affected by climate change, have repeatedly emphasized the need for historical accountability and adequate adaptation funding. Yet the \$100 billion per year climate finance pledge by developed countries remains unfulfilled (Oxfam, 2023), leading to accusations of hypocrisy and a growing call for climate justice.

In this context, many Global South states are pursuing multi-alignment rather than bandwagoning with any one power. This reflects both pragmatic calculations and ideological commitments to autonomy and sovereignty. Platforms such as the G77, BRICS, and the Non-Aligned Movement continue to be used to articulate demands for global equity, institutional reform, and development-oriented cooperation.

3.3. The Crisis of Multilateralism and the Contest Over Global Norms

The architecture of post-World War II multilateralism, centred on the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the liberal international order, is increasingly seen as inadequate for today’s challenges (Sabaratnam, 2013). While these institutions played a central role in maintaining global stability and facilitating cooperation during the Cold War and its aftermath, they now face a profound legitimacy crisis.

Mazarr (2022) highlights that the UN system is losing relevance amid growing unilateralism, competing coalitions, and alternative norm-setting platforms. Many great powers – including the United States itself – have at times bypassed or undermined

the UN system when it has proven inconvenient. Meanwhile, new actors such as China and Russia are promoting alternative governance models through institutions like BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and regional development banks.

Brender (2025) notes that countries in the Global South increasingly view Western-led multilateralism as elitist, exclusive, and slow to reform. The failure to democratize global governance, fulfil development commitments, and offer equitable voice to developing countries has eroded trust. For many, the response to conflicts such as Ukraine and Palestine illustrates the double standards of Western powers, reinforcing perceptions of a biased and selective international order.

In response, the Global South is not merely withdrawing from multilateralism but is attempting to reshape it. The expanded BRICS group, which now includes countries such as Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, and Indonesia, represents a form of “bloc politics” centred not on ideology but on shared dissatisfaction with the current order. These coalitions aim to offer strategic alternatives, whether in development finance, trade norms, or political alignment. Their growth is not necessarily anti-Western but reflects a desire for pluralism and equitable participation (Fawcett, 2015).

Nonetheless, the proliferation of overlapping platforms, regional arrangements, and issue-based coalitions raises concerns about fragmentation and incoherence. Rather

Table 1: Comparison of international organizations

Aspect	Bandung 1955	BRICS (2009–present)	MIKTA (2013 - present)
Ideology	Anti-imperialism, solidarity	Economic pragmatism, multipolarity	Reformation agenda, multipolarity
Membership	Asia and Africa (mostly post-colonial)	Cross-regional emerging powers	Cross-regional emerging powers but include western alliances (South Korea and Australia)
Structure	Loose, movement-oriented	Institutionalized, summit-driven	Informal, Summit-driven
Focus	Political independence, unity	Economic growth, global influence	Global governance reform
Approach	Normative and value-driven	Strategic and interest-based	Informal and voluntarily

Source: The author's own work.

than coordinated global governance, the world risks devolving into spheres of influence and competing norms. This has major implications for pressing transnational challenges such as climate change, pandemics, cybersecurity, and global financial stability.

4. Comparative Frameworks: NAM, BRICS, and MIKTA

The development of NAM, BRICS, and MIKTA has taken different paths. NAM, founded on the spirit of independence among Asian and African countries, inspired anti-colonial movements in numerous colonized nations. Its strong solidarity and commitment to formally abolish colonialism achieved significant success. In contrast, BRICS, led primarily by China and Russia, has emerged as one of the world's largest economic blocs, surpassing even the G7 in some economic indicators. Its cooperation, grounded in economic interests and strategic alignment, has been particularly effective, especially with China's rise as a major global power. MIKTA, on the other hand, emerged in the context of increasing demands for reform of global institutions, particularly the UN Security Council, and during the expansion of the G20 process. Its formation reflects a shared understanding among its members, positioning MIKTA as a key "minilateral" grouping in various international forums. However, its impact has been more symbolic than structural.

Within the broader discourse of Southern multilateralism, NAM stands as a historical anchor, a legacy institution born from the Bandung Conference of 1955, which sought to articulate a collective postcolonial voice resisting Cold War bipolarity. From an International Relations (IR) perspective, NAM represents an early normative challenge to hegemonic power structures that rooted in constructivist and postcolonial critiques of global order (Hurrell, 2010).

In terms of membership, NAM is a large and inclusive movement, currently comprising 120 member states, 17 observer countries, and 10 observer organizations. BRICS initially consisted of five core members, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, but has since expanded to 11 members. MIKTA, by contrast, has maintained its original composition: Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia. Although MIKTA has engaged with other countries, such as Malaysia, and is sometimes linked with the "Next Eleven" grouping proposed by Goldman Sachs, it has not formally expanded its membership.

Structurally, NAM has seen little progress since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, one of its original leaders. Having achieved many of its founding goals, particularly the decolonization of its member states, NAM now lacks a clear direction. Although the issue of Palestine remains unresolved, there has been no significant new mission or form of pragmatic cooperation to address contemporary global challenges. Ironically, if NAM's members were more united, the movement could represent a major force in the international system.

Despite its operational limitations, NAM continues to embody core principles derived from Bandung, sovereignty, non-intervention, and resistance to external domination. These principles retain normative power, especially for smaller states wary of great power competition or interventionism. In this regard, NAM functions as a discursive platform, projecting a counter-hegemonic narrative in global fora such as the UN.

From a normative IR lens, this symbolic function remains critical. While BRICS emphasizes reform of global economic governance and MIKTA focuses on coalition-building among middle powers, NAM reasserts the foundational norms of Westphalian sovereignty, serving as a reminder that Southern solidarity cannot be entirely decoupled from its anti-colonial roots.

BRICS, in contrast, has developed into a structured and strategic alliance, with institutional mechanisms and coordinated cooperation that offer tangible benefits to its members. This has been a key advantage of BRICS. Meanwhile, MIKTA, formed through informal dialogue within the G20 and UN forums, has struggled to build a consistent agenda. Its initiatives remain sporadic and heavily reliant on the leadership and political will of individual member states.

NAM's original mission, achieving political independence, has largely been accomplished. However, the movement has failed to redefine its role in the post-colonial era. It has not effectively mobilized against military invasions by major powers or tackled global economic dependency. NAM now appears stagnant and hesitant to formulate a new strategic vision. The question arises: could BRICS face a similar fate once it consolidates its status as a leading economic bloc? Perhaps not, China's ongoing efforts to challenge U.S. global dominance may provide BRICS with sustained momentum.

As for MIKTA, progress on its central aim, reforming global governance, has been limited. The group often appears stalled, lacking a unified strategic direction. A stron-

ger commitment is needed if MIKTA is to remain relevant and influential in shaping global norms.

These trajectories reflect the distinct approaches adopted by each group. NAM, rooted in normative principles such as anti-colonialism, failed to sustain momentum once its initial goals were met, especially as its founding countries became increasingly fragmented. BRICS, with its pragmatic, results-oriented approach, has gained appeal beyond its founding members and shows potential to evolve into a dominant global actor. MIKTA's informal, interest-based approach has not translated into meaningful outcomes, as divergent political orientations among its members have hindered deeper cooperation and strategic cohesion.

Taken together, NAM, BRICS, and MIKTA offer divergent answers to a central question: how should the Global South organize itself in response to a transforming global order? NAM maintains the moral and normative legacy of Bandung, continuing to articulate principles rooted in anti-colonial resistance. BRICS offers a power-oriented alternative, advocating structural change and institutional autonomy. MIKTA, meanwhile, embraces a pragmatic and reformist strategy, seeking to contribute to global governance through issue-specific cooperation and middle-power diplomacy.

The Bandung Conference of 1955 was not merely a product of Cold War positioning but a bold assertion of agency by postcolonial states. The often-misunderstood non-alignment movement was not about passive neutrality but active resistance to being co-opted by either superpower bloc. As Acharya asserts, Bandung demonstrated “agency”, a will to shape the post-war international order rather than be shaped by it.

Sukarno and Nehru envisioned a non-aligned front not as a withdrawal from global politics, but as a conscious rejection of superpower dominance and a move toward ethical internationalism. Countries like Egypt, Indonesia, and India articulated a desire to create space for independent policymaking amid bipolar tensions. This agency remains relevant today, where the international order is increasingly multipolar and fractured.

In today's world, non-alignment has evolved into strategic autonomy, as the ability of states to navigate between competing powers while safeguarding national interests. Indonesia's “free and active” (*bebas aktif*) policy is a direct descendant of Bandung's

ideals. It allows Jakarta to engage with major powers, which are China, the U.S., Japan, while maintaining an independent line, especially within ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific frameworks

India, on the other hand, exemplifies strategic autonomy by balancing its participation in the QUAD (with the U.S., Japan, and Australia) and continued commitment to BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This dual engagement enables India to maximize its strategic flexibility without formal alignment. As for Brazil, though geographically outside Bandung's core, adopts a similar approach. Through BRICS and South–South diplomacy, it asserts leadership in global governance reform while avoiding entanglements with NATO or U.S.-led blocs. Strategic autonomy thus reflects a shift from non-alignment as a Cold War stance to a contemporary assertion of multidirectional engagement rooted in Bandung's foundational logic.

Juned & Saripudin note that while Bandung ideals are celebrated, actual cooperation often lacks depth beyond government rhetoric. The promise of South–South cooperation, including mutual development, technical exchange, and shared security, remains under-realized in practice. However, emerging trends reflect Bandung's legacy:

1. Development partnerships are seen in ASEAN-Africa dialogues, the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), and initiatives like the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC).
2. Debt restructuring and economic diplomacy between Indonesia and East African countries, while still limited, are being reimagined through ICT (international cooperation theory) lenses. The authors advocate moving beyond postcolonial symbolism to structural frameworks that foster business-to-business and grassroots reciprocity
3. Peace mediation roles, such as Indonesia's participation in Myanmar diplomacy or East Africa's roles in Somalia, highlight how Global South actors are developing conflict-resolution capacities previously dominated by Western powers.

Based on Juned & Saripudin notion, the institutionalization of South–South cooperation, though uneven, reflects Bandung's transformation from normative aspiration into operational practice.

In further exploration of Bandung as a normative anchor in multipolar institutions, Acharya emphasizes Bandung's enduring normative legacy: peaceful coexistence, sovereignty, and mutual respect. These principles continue to inform diplomacy in regional institutions such as ASEAN, which institutionalizes consensus, non-interference, and neutrality. Also reflected on the African Union (AU) and East African Community (EAC) principles on regional peace and economic integration. Bandung legacy also shared similar underpinning principle with BRICS, particularly in challenging Western-centric multilateralism and advocates for greater representation of Global South voices. Thus, by following the legacy, Bandung Spirit lies not in creating permanent institutions, but in shaping normative templates that Global South actors continue to adapt in multilateral forums.

5. The Bandung Spirit as Political Imaginary and Moral Force

From its inception, Bandung Spirit was imbued with a symbolic resonance that far exceeded the institutional structures it created. The conference, attended by 29 Asian and African states, was a prominent moment in the articulation of an alternative vision for world order that voiced sovereignty, anti-imperialism, peaceful coexistence, and cultural solidarity. As Juned and Saripudin (2025) note, the Bandung Spirit, often cited in diplomatic discourse across Asia and Africa, has become a discursive tool that connects contemporary South-South relations to a shared postcolonial heritage. In Indonesia, the “Bandung Spirit” is frequently referenced in multilateral forums and bilateral diplomacy, especially with African nations, as a reminder of shared struggles and mutual potential. In India, references to Bandung continue to shape the rhetorical foundation of its leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), BRICS, and the G77.

This symbolic use of Bandung operates as a form of soft power. It constructs a narrative of moral leadership and normative legitimacy for the Global South. As Acharya observes, Bandung allows postcolonial states to claim historical agency and to legitimize calls for a multipolar world order not rooted in militarism or financial domination, but in solidarity and justice. The Bandung imaginary thus functions not only as memory but as a diplomatic repertoire, enabling states like Indonesia, India, and South Africa to invoke a tradition of peaceful resistance and mutual respect in their regional and global engagements.

However, symbolism without substance can also become hollow. The enduring power of Bandung lies in its ability to animate new forms of cooperation. The challenge is to prevent Bandung Spirit from becoming merely ceremonial. Another challenge comes with the interlinked global dynamics of the deepening economic dependencies that undermine strategic autonomy, and the weak engagement of civil society in foreign policy.

Acharya cautions that one of Bandung's negative legacies was its unintended encouragement of economic dependencies that eroded state's autonomy. While South-South trade has increased substantially, Juned and Saripudin argue that economic relations between Asian and African countries remain constrained by asymmetries in capital, infrastructure, and market access. Moreover, despite Bandung's call for economic self-reliance, many Global South nations continue to depend heavily on loans, aid, and investment from former colonial powers or emerging powers like China. This economic entanglement reduces the policy space for truly independent diplomacy and development planning. It also leads to unequal partnerships that contradict the egalitarian ethos of Bandung.

Further challenges lie in the contradictory principles of grassroots decolonisation with foreign policy in many Global South countries today remains elite-driven and disconnected from public debate. Civil society, youth, and academic actors are often sidelined from shaping international agendas or critiquing their country's foreign policy choices. Juned and Saripudin observe that while governments frequently cite Bandung in official rhetoric, few efforts have been made to institutionalize the spirit of Bandung at the grassroots level or to translate it into people-to-people initiatives. The result is a symbolic deficit: Bandung Spirit is celebrated by ministries, but not necessarily felt by citizens, especially the youth. The democratic deficit in foreign policy undermines the transformative potential of Bandung. It also weakens its appeal as a forward-looking movement, rather than a historical memory.

Thus, to reclaim Bandung Spirit as a living, evolving framework for justice and solidarity, it must be anchored in new practices of civic diplomacy, cross-cultural engagement, and global issue-based coalitions. Civil society, youth movements, artists, and academics should be actively involved in shaping the future of Global South cooperation. Platforms that bring together youth from Asia, Africa, and Latin America – through digital summits, cultural exchanges, and joint climate initiatives – can revitalize Bandung's participatory ethos. As Juned and Saripudin suggest, postco-

lonial solidarity should not remain the monopoly of the state; it must be practiced by societies and individuals. This means creating alternative foreign policy forums, Bandung-inspired student networks, and participatory research initiatives that bridge continents.

Education and cultural diplomacy are powerful vehicles for reactivating Bandung. Academic networks and South-South university partnerships can foster epistemic solidarity. Scholars from Africa and Asia can collaborate to challenge Western-dominated IR theory, develop decolonial curricula, and co-produce knowledge that centres Global South perspectives. Cultural exchange, including literature, film, music, and performance, can humanize foreign policy and amplify narratives of shared histories and futures. This counters the technocratic drift of contemporary diplomacy and reaffirms the cultural foundations of Bandung. As Acharya's notion of Global IR aligns with this effort, calling for IR scholarship that respects the multiplicity of voices, traditions, and experiences beyond the West (Acharya, 2014).

Finally, Bandung's principles must be updated to address the most urgent crises of the contemporary era: climate change, systemic racism, global inequality, and militarism. Reinvigorating Bandung means shifting from geopolitical non-alignment to ethical realignment – positioning the Global South as a collective force for planetary justice. This involves supporting initiatives like the Loss and Damage Fund, promoting equitable vaccine access, resisting militarized nationalism, and championing multilateral peace efforts in places like Palestine, Myanmar, and Sudan. It also means advocating for climate reparations and ecological justice, not as aid, but as moral and historical responsibility.

6. Conclusions: A New Bandung Moment?

The Bandung Spirit, originally rooted in anti-colonial solidarity, political independence, and normative resistance to global hegemony, remains a powerful symbolic and moral force. However, its institutional legacy, especially through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), has stagnated due to ideological fragmentation and the end of the Cold War's bipolarity. Meanwhile, BRICS has emerged as a strategic alliance grounded in pragmatic economic coordination and structural reform, while MIKTA reflects a flexible, interest-based coalition of middle powers seeking global governance reform. Each of these formations addresses different aspects of Global

South aspirations: NAM as a moral anchor, BRICS as a power-oriented bloc, and MIKTA as a reformist platform. Rather than discarding the Bandung legacy, the document argues for its reinterpretation – where Bandung provides ethical orientation, BRICS the instruments for structural change, and MIKTA the agility for strategic engagement. Together, these platforms illustrate how the Bandung Spirit can evolve into a multi-dimensional framework suited for 21st-century geopolitics.

In the face of declining unipolarity and intensifying great power rivalries, countries of the Global South must adopt a strategy of strategic autonomy, inspired by Bandung's foundational logic of independence and dignity. Rather than aligning rigidly with major powers or forming ideological blocs, nations like Indonesia, India, and Brazil are charting multi-vector foreign policies that prioritize sovereignty while engaging pragmatically with global partners. This vision transforms non-alignment from a Cold War tactic into a multipolar navigation tool – allowing states to resist economic neocolonialism, diversify partnerships, and build resilient institutions. Bandung thus becomes not merely a nostalgic reference but a normative compass guiding Global South actors through the complexities of digital capitalism, climate injustice, and structural inequality. Sovereign cooperation, as envisioned in this renewed Bandung logic, means collaborating on shared interests, such as development finance, technology transfer, peacebuilding, and environmental governance, without surrendering political agency or becoming economically dependent.

To transform the Bandung Spirit from symbolism into substance, the document calls for inclusive, bottom-up reinvestment in its ideals. This requires not only state-level diplomacy but the active participation of civil society, youth, academia, and cultural actors in reimagining Global South cooperation. The document highlights the need for institutional innovations, such as Bandung-inspired academic networks, youth platforms, decolonial knowledge production, and cross-regional climate justice coalitions – to give form to new solidarities. Moreover, civic diplomacy must become central to Global South internationalism, ensuring that foreign policy reflects the aspirations of people, not just elites. A 21st-century Bandung demands that diplomacy be democratised, foreign policy be decolonised, and multilateralism be re-legitimised through inclusive and pluralistic engagement. The document ultimately asserts that Bandung's true legacy lies in its imaginative force, its ability to inspire new narratives and create transformative possibilities for justice, equity, and peace in a fractured world order.

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THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GREAT POWERS IN THE MULTIPOLAR ERA – THE CHOICE AND EVOLUTION OF CHINA’S NON-ALIGNMENT DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY

Huifang Tian¹

Abstract

The contemporary discourse of “great power rivalry” in the court of global public opinion, which implies power politics and hegemonic struggle, is not congruent with the purpose of The People’s Republic China’s international relations. China has historically placed significant emphasis on the notion that its primary objective has never been to supplant other nations, but rather to transcend its own previous achievements. China has adopted an independent foreign policy of peace, consistently determining its position and policy based on the merits of the matter at hand. The country has also emphasized the development of friendship and cooperation with all nations, guided by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The strategy of non-alignment is an optimal solution that China has devised from a combination of historical experience, real-world conditions, and domestic considerations. This diplomatic policy aligns with the interests and values of the Chinese populace. This paper will provide a comprehensive examination of the historical underpinnings and rationales underpinning China’s non-aligned diplomatic strategy. It will delve into the fundamental tenets of this strategy, tracing its continuous evolution and refinement over time. A particular emphasis will be placed on China’s diplomatic praxis and the efficacy of its adherence to the principle of non-alignment in the contemporary era, characterized by an intricate discourse between alliance and non-alignment.

Keywords: *Bandung, China, diplomacy, non-alignment, multipolarity*

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1. Introduction

The 1960s witnessed the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as a response to the growing threat to the sovereignty and security of numerous newly independent states posed by the struggle for spheres of influence between the superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union. The initiative to establish NAM was proposed by President Tito of Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Nehru of India and President Nasser of Egypt, who convened on the Yugoslav Island of Brijuni in July 1956. Subsequently, following a period of five years characterized by gestation and preparation, the inaugural Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries was convened in Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia, in September 1961. The 25 participating countries collectively issued a declaration of peace, thereby establishing the Non-Aligned Movement. Subsequent to this period, the Non-Aligned Movement has undergone significant growth and evolved into a prominent, autonomous political entity within the global political landscape, a fact that cannot be disregarded. The Movement's principles of non-alignment, independence, autonomy and non-bloc affiliation, as well as its anti-imperialist and anti-colonial stance, have been embraced and supported by an increasing number of developing countries in the Third World.

The Chinese Government has consistently demonstrated unwavering support for the Non-Aligned Movement, fostering robust cooperation with the Movement in the context of international affairs. The inception of the Non-Aligned Movement was marked by the publication of an editorial in the People's Daily on 9 September 1961, which asserted China's historical support for the principle of peaceful neutrality among national independent countries and the policy of non-alignment. This stance, the editorial noted, had been consistent since these nations had achieved independence from colonial rule and embarked on their respective paths towards independent development (People's Daily, 1961). The refusal to join military blocs of imperialism was accompanied by an opposition to the establishment of imperialist military bases on their own soil. Furthermore, there was a preference for peaceful coexistence with countries exhibiting different social systems. This position was not only consistent with national interests, but also had a positive effect on weakening the war power of imperialism, strengthening the forces of world peace, and making the world more peaceful. The positive effect of war, power and the strengthening of the forces of world

peace has been demonstrated. In 1992, at the 10th Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, China officially became an observer state of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Non-alignment can be defined as China's positive response to the question of how to promote the establishment of a new international political order in an era of great world changes. China's commitment to a path of peaceful development and the principle of non-alignment in international relations is not only an inheritance and promotion of the peace-loving cultural traditions of the Chinese people over millennia, but is also grounded in both positive and negative historical experiences since the establishment of China. This commitment also encompasses the diplomatic traditions and practices of China. The implementation of a non-aligned diplomatic strategy has resulted in significant advances in China's independent foreign policy and has propelled China's independent and peaceful diplomacy into a new era.

2. The origin and early practice of China's non-aligned diplomacy

It is evident that diplomacy is reflective of both history and culture. China is a peace-loving nation. Since ancient times, the Chinese people have recognised that 'although a country is big, a warlike state will surely perish', 'peace is precious', 'harmony and difference', 'turning war into jade and silk', 'national peace and tranquillity', 'good neighbourliness and friendship', 'peace and security'. These principles have been passed down from generation to generation. It can be posited that the pursuit of peace, harmony and concord has been deeply rooted in the spiritual world of the Chinese nation and deeply intertwined with the blood of the Chinese people. Especially in recent times, the suffering brought to the Chinese nation by wars and turmoil is still deeply engraved in the minds of the Chinese people, and the love of peace has always been the tireless pursuit of them. Concurrently, the century-long history of modern humiliation has shaped the Chinese people's national psychology of 'independence and autonomy'.

Despite the fact that the notion of 'non-alignment' was not explicitly mentioned in the foreign policy of the early years of the founding of New China (1949-1950s), the core elements of this concept were already embedded. The preservation of state sovereignty and territorial integrity is of paramount importance to the Chinese nation, as

these concepts are fundamental to the country's territorial identity and international standing. This principle is enshrined in the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2003), signed on February 14, 1950, which stipulates that the two sides shall undertake the responsibility of developing and consolidating the economic and cultural relations in a spirit of friendship and cooperation and in accordance with the principles of equality, mutual benefit, mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. This treaty had summarised the first four of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and laid the foundation for the formulation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

On 31 December 1953, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, during his reception of a delegation from the Indian Government, articulated the Five Principles of mutual respect for territorial sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and reciprocity, and peaceful coexistence, which were endorsed by the Indian side (Xinhua News Agency, 2024). In April 1955, the Asian-African Conference was held in Bandung, which adopted the Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference, the Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation and other elements, recognising that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are a solid foundation for mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among nations, and calling on the governments of Asia and the world to agree to make these principles the cornerstone of their relations with all nations.

The Bandung Conference was a significant milestone in the evolution of the Non-Aligned Movement. Subsequent to that point in time, the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence have been extensively accepted and endorsed by the international community, been constantly quoted or reaffirmed in numerous significant international conferences and a series of international documents, and become the foundational norms of contemporary international relations and the fundamental principles of international law.

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have also established the foundation of New China's independent and peaceful foreign policy." On the basis of the Five Principles, new China safeguarded its national sovereignty and independence, broken through the boundaries of ideology and social systems in the international exchanges, sought common ground while reserving differences, and worked in solidarity and

cooperation with all countries that are willing to make peace, including the United States. In 1971, China returned to the United Nations with the support of most developing countries and resumed its legitimate seat at the United Nations. Subsequent to that period, China has made its own contribution to the fulfilment of the purposes of the United Nations Charter, the maintenance of world peace, and the strengthening of friendship and cooperation among nations.

As was articulated by China's former Premier Zhou Enlai (Liu, 2024), all countries worldwide, irrespective of their size, strength and weakness, and regardless of their social systems, can coexist peacefully. The right of all peoples to national independence and autonomy must be respected. It is an irrefutable right of all peoples to choose their national systems and ways of life without interference from other countries. If all countries worldwide conduct their international relations in accordance with these principles, the likelihood of threats and aggression by one country against another would be significantly reduced, and thereby the possibility of peaceful coexistence among the nations of the world would become a reality.

3. Developments during the period of reform and opening: an independent foreign policy of peace

In the 1970s and 1980s, the international situation underwent significant changes. The world's bipolar political pattern, characterised by the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, had reached the end of its hegemony after a long period; the threat of war was diminishing, and the forces of peace were growing stronger. In this context, China realised that aligning with either party or establishing a strategic relationship with either would inevitably affect the balance of power, which would not be conducive to stability in the international situation or to China playing an independent and autonomous role as a peaceful force outside the bipolarity.

Deng Xiaoping, the leader of China, asserted that the themes of the time were peace and development, replacing the previous themes of war and revolution. He pointed out: Two major issues are prominent on the international stage: peace and the North-South issue. He regarded development as an important factor in preventing and eliminating wars and made clear his policy of 'non-alignment', stating that 'alliances will hinder the making of friends' (Ruonan, 2017). In 1982, China's Constitution included the 'independent foreign policy of peace' (Constitution of the People's Republic

of China, 1982). In 1982, the ‘independent foreign policy of peace’ was included in China’s Constitution, formally establishing China’s principle of non-alignment.

In September 1982, in his opening speech at the 12th Party Congress (People’s Daily, 2008), Deng Xiaoping stated that independence and self-reliance, no matter in the past, present or future, should be China’s foundation’, and no foreign country should expect China to be their vassal or accept the consequences of harming China’s interests. He told the world that ‘alliances will prevent us from making friends’. In December 1988, during a meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, Deng Xiaoping made it clear that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence should form the basis of a new international political order (People’s Daily Online, 2017). He said that these principles encompass the common values of all mankind, such as peace, development, fairness and justice, and are in line with the fundamental interests of all peoples worldwide, vividly reflecting the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, and thus have become universally recognised as the norms for interaction between nations.

In the 1990s, amid the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, China adopted the approach of ‘keeping a low profile, keeping one’s head down, and taking action’. Through promoting good relations with neighbouring countries, participating in multilateral cooperation mechanisms and combining the principle of non-alignment with preserving the period of strategic opportunity, China developed a comprehensive approach to ‘non-alignment, non-confrontation and non-targeting of third countries’. In 1993, it established its first strategic cooperative partnership with Brazil.

This evolutionary process has been driven by the demand for sovereignty and independence, the strategic environment and the interests of development. It reflects China’s transformation from passively adapting to the international landscape to actively shaping the international order. Since the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were put forward 70 years ago, China has consistently pursued a path of peaceful development. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, with their distinctive traditional Chinese cultural characteristics, have contributed oriental wisdom to the correct handling of relations between nations.

4. Innovation in Non-Aligned Diplomacy in the New Era: Constructing a New Type of International Relations Based on Win-Win Cooperation

Since the 18th National Congress, the principle of non-alignment has served to safeguard China's national sovereignty, independence and development interests. This principle can be considered a continuation of the strategic autonomy of 'independently deciding on its position according to the merits of the matter itself'. In 2018, China passed the Amendments to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which added the following words to its preamble: "keeps to a path of peaceful development, follows a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up, works to develop diplomatic relations and economic and cultural exchanges with other countries, and promotes the building of a human community with a shared future" (Amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 2018). This marks the first occasion since the promulgation and implementation of the 1982 Constitution that the contents of the Constitution pertaining to foreign policy have been enriched and improved. It is an articulation of the primary accomplishments in the realms of foreign policy theory and practice innovation since the 18th National Congress, guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and the highest articulation of China's foreign policy philosophy within the framework of national rule of law. It is evident that China's non-aligned policy has undergone a process of continuous innovation in practice, evolving into a more constructive paradigm for a new type of international relations, which is primarily manifested in four distinct aspects:

4.1. Calling for "partnership rather than alliance" and seeking a new global partnership

As noted by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the General Debate of the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024), major countries should follow the principles of no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation in handling their relations, and big countries should treat small countries as equals, and take a right approach to justice and interests by putting justice before interests. The propensity for large nations to engage in harmonious relations with one another is

paramount”. His speech showed that what China does is to seek a global partnership at both international and regional levels, and pursue a new approach to state-to-state relations, one that features dialogue rather than confrontation, and partnership rather than alliance. And this global partnership possesses three fundamental characteristics:

The first is equality, whereby all countries, irrespective of their size or wealth, should respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of other countries, as well as the development paths and values that each has chosen. President Xi emphasized in the speech that the principle of sovereignty not only means that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries are inviolable and their internal affairs are not subjected to interference, also means that all countries’ right to independently choose social systems and development paths should be upheld, and that all countries’ endeavors to promote economic and social development and improve their people’s lives should be respected.

The second is peacefulness. The fundamental distinction between a partnership and a military alliance lies in the absence of an imaginary enemy or the targeting of a third party. Furthermore, it does not involve the intervention of the military factor in interstate relations. Instead, it is predicated on the principle of cooperation rather than confrontation in state-to-state relations, and the notion of a mutually beneficial outcome rather than a zero-sum scenario. President Xi advocated for the abandonment of the traditional zero-sum paradigm, which posits one’s gain means the other’s loss or that the winner shall take all. Instead, he proposed a multilateral approach, emphasizing the pursuit of a ‘win-win’ outcome for all parties involved.

Furthermore, inclusiveness is emphasized, signifying the transcendence of differences and similarities in social systems and ideologies to optimise common interests and pursuits. As Chinese leaders has repeatedly emphasized in many occasions, the pursuit of mutual understanding and the identification of shared interests are pivotal for effective international cooperation. China acknowledges the reality that alliance politics still exists in the world and respects the right of countries to independently choose their foreign policies, while at the same time, it also hopes that all parties will look at the trend of the times and explore the construction of a more inclusive and constructive partnership that does not set up any hypothetical enemies and does not target any third parties. In the context of international affairs, China will adhere to the principle of independent diplomacy, determining its own position and formulating its own judgments based on a thorough evaluation of the merits of the matter.

In short, the concept of “mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation” has been identified as a defining characteristic of China’s new type of international relations. This approach has been noted for its ability to transcend the differences and similarities between countries, parties and systems, aligning with the expectations of the majority of countries and aligning with the common interests of the international community.

4.2. Creating new prospects for common development with its partners through Global Development Initiative (GDI)

The Global Development Initiative (GDI) was inaugurated by Chinese President Xi Jinping on 21 September 2021 at the general debate of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly, aiming at steering global development toward a new stage of balanced, coordinated and inclusive growth in face of the severe shocks of COVID-19. He placed significant emphasis on the notion that the pursuit of development is paramount to the attainment of human happiness, and advocated for collaborative efforts to revitalize the economy and pursue more robust, greener and more balanced global development. The initiative comprises the following key Principles (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2021):

Firstly, GDI takes development as a priority, calling on the international community to accelerate implementation of the 2030 SDGs for stronger, greener and healthier global development and foster a global community of development with a shared future, through the strengthening of policy coordination among major economies, the promotion of synergy in the multilateral development cooperation process, and the acceleration of the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The priority areas for cooperation in the Initiative include poverty alleviation, food security, COVID-19 response and vaccines, development financing, climate change and green development, industrialization, digital economy and connectivity.

Secondly, the Initiative upholds the core concept of people-centredness, taking the enhancement of people’s well-being and the realisation of comprehensive human development as its starting and ending point. It advocates that all peoples of the world have the right to pursue and realise a better life, supports the accelerated development of developing countries, especially vulnerable countries in particularly difficult circumstances, supports the common development of vulnerable groups within count-

ries, and supports all countries to achieve sustainable development while positively addressing challenges such as the digital divide, climate change and the growth trap, and strives to leave no country behind. The Initiative also supports the role of the United Nations in integrating and coordinating the process of sustainable development.

Thirdly, GDI advocates inclusive development and fosters the exchange of development experiences among developed and developing countries, with particular attention paid to the special needs of developing countries. The objective is to resolve the problems of imbalanced and insufficient development among and within countries. The Initiative also places emphasis on the promotion of synergies among global, regional and country-specific development cooperation, and encourages the involvement of international organisations, governments, businesses and industry, academia, civil society and other relevant parties in the formulation of strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Fourthly, GDI calls upon the international community to capitalise on the unprecedented opportunity presented by the ongoing scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation to establish an open, equitable, and non-discriminatory environment conducive to scientific and technological advancement, to expedite the translation of scientific and technological advancements into tangible productive forces, to leverage the emerging momentum for global economic growth, and to collaborate closely to achieve substantial and rapid development.

Fifthly, The Initiative proffers the principle of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature and calls for improved global environmental governance, active responses to climate change, stronger, greener and healthier global development, and the establishment of a community of life between human beings and nature. The call issued by China to the global community is one of notable potency, emanating from a sustained contemplation of the harmonious symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature. This contemplation is inextricably intertwined with the promotion of socialist modernisation in China in the contemporary era, and the perpetual pursuit of high-quality development that is both development-oriented and ecologically sustainable.

Sixthly, the Initiative employs an action-oriented approach and calls for increased investment in development resources, with a focus on promoting cooperation in the areas of poverty reduction, food security, financing for development, climate change

and green development, industrialisation, the digital economy and connectivity. The overarching aim of this approach is to accelerate the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

4.3. Emphasizing a fair and just security global pattern by proposing the Global Security Initiative (GSI)

The contemporary world is experiencing significant upheaval, with humanity confronted with numerous challenges. Protectionism and pan-securitization have had a significant impact on the global economy, while unilateralism and bloc politics have had a marked effect on the international system. The Russia-Ukraine, the Middle East conflict, and new challenges, such as artificial intelligence, climate change and polar space, have emerged in succession. In order to address the global security challenges, address the international security deficit, and promote collective global security, at the inauguration of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) 2022 Annual Conference on 21 April 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a Global Security Initiative, delineating the six commitments as follows (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2022):

- Stay committed to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security
- Stay committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.
- Stay committed to abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter
- Stay committed to taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously
- Stay committed to peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation
- Stay committed to maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains

These six commitments are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and constitute an organic whole of dialectical unity. The notion of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security provides the conceptual foundation for this approach.

This new security initiative can be regarded as an upgraded version of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which provide a comprehensive explanation of China's security concept of global governance in the new era. As President Xi emphasized that, in the era of economic globalisation, the security of all countries is interconnected and mutually affecting, no nation state can seek absolute security in isolation, nor can it derive stability from the turmoil of others. In this perspective, the law of the jungle is regarded as an inherent aspect of international relations, rather than a means of fostering peaceful coexistence among nations.

4.4. Advocating a mutual understanding among civilizations by proposing the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI)

The world comprises more than 200 countries and regions, 2,500 ethnic groups and many religions, which have collectively engendered a rich and colorful civilization, each of which represents a shared treasure of humankind. Each civilization is considered a shared cultural heritage of humanity (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2015). These varied civilizations have interacted with one another, fostering mutual achievements and contributing to the resplendent tapestry of human civilization. The Global Civilization Initiative is an illustration of China's commitment to collaborate with the international community to establish a new paradigm of humanistic exchanges, cultural integration, and people-to-people contact among all countries worldwide, with the objective of enhancing the splendor and vibrancy of the myriad civilizations that exist globally.

Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) was formally introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in his keynote speech during the High-Level Dialogue between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and World Political Parties on 15 March 2023. The main elements of the initiative are as follows (Xinhua News Agency, 2023):

Firstly, it demonstrates a respect for the diversity of world civilizations, calls upon all countries to adhere to civilizational equality, mutual appreciation, dialogue and inclusiveness, to transcend civilizational barriers by facilitating civilizational exchanges, civilizational mutual appreciation through civilizational clashes, and civilizational inclusiveness through civilizational superiority.

Secondly, the promotion of shared values such as peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom for all humanity is paramount. In addition, the fostering of

a broad-minded understanding of different civilizations' perceptions of the connotations of these values is essential. It is crucial to refrain from imposing one's own values and models on others, and from engaging in ideological confrontation.

Thirdly, it attaches importance to civilizational inheritance and innovation, and promotes the creative transformation and innovative development of the outstanding traditional cultures of all countries in the process of modernization.

Fourthly, the necessity of strengthening international humanistic exchanges and cooperation is advocated, with a view to the promotion of mutual understanding and affinity among peoples, and the joint promotion of the development and progress of human civilization.

In the Initiative, President Xi highlighted the historical adoption and integration of various cultural and religious practices within China, emphasizing the long-standing coexistence of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, and other belief systems, spanning millennia, on Chinese soil. This unique historical phenomenon stands in stark contrast to the global context, underscoring China's profound commitment to cultural and religious pluralism. The historical development of Chinese civilization provides substantial evidence that different cultures and religions can indeed coexist harmoniously without causing harm to one another. The fundamental prerequisite for this coexistence is the principle of treating all individuals and groups as equals, rather than condescendingly or disparagingly. It is essential to foster mutual appreciation and respect, rather than exclusion and discrimination.

5. Impact and significance of China's non-aligned diplomacy

China's concept of "partnership and non-alignment" and its three major initiatives on global development, global security and global civilization strongly demonstrate the distinctive spirit of autonomy, inclusiveness and peacefulness of Chinese civilization, reflecting China's distinctive outlook on global governance in the new era.

5.1. Achievement of China's non-aligned diplomacy in new stage

Following the proposal of the concept of a “partnership rather than alliance,” China has proceeded to expand the scope of the partnership. In March 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping made a historic visit to the headquarters of the European Union, proposing that China is willing to work with Europe to build the four major partnerships of peace, growth, reform and civilization between China and Europe. During President Xi Jinping's visit to the Republic of Korea in 2014, the two countries agreed to collaborate in achieving common development, commit to regional peace, work together to revitalize Asia, and promote global prosperity (Xinhua News Agency, 2014). In September of that year, President Xi visited India, where he proposed the establishment of three major partnerships between China and India: a closer development partnership, a growth-led partnership, and a global partnership for strategic collaboration (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2014). In December 2014, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced that a network of global partnerships was taking shape.

Till now, China had established partnerships with more than 100 countries and regional organizations, representing a substantial expansion from the 2014 figures (People's Daily Overseas Edition, 2024). The partnership network upholds the basic features of equality, openness and cooperation, advocating the diplomatic concepts of dialogue rather than confrontation, and partnership rather than alliance.

On the international stage, China has pursued peaceful diplomacy, resisted military alliances against third parties, and opposed the negative impact on regional common security as a result of the conclusion of military relations. China also places special emphasis on strengthening non-traditional security cooperation. It has established the China-ASEAN Public Health Emergency Response Reserve, and will provide \$530 million in vaccine assistance to Southeast Asian countries by 2024, with a view to building a new mechanism for regional health governance. It had joined the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, breaking away from the traditional development assistance model and establishing a non-binding multilateral action alliance.

China is committed to building a global partnership for development, focusing on poverty reduction, climate change and other issues, and contributing a series of Chinese solutions. Since the launch of the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Group of Friends of the Initiative has grown to include more than 80 countries (Ministry

of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024). Thirty-five countries in Africa have joined the Group, accounting for more than 40% of the total number of countries worldwide. Meanwhile the network of Global Development Promotion Centers has attracted over 70 countries, regions and international organisations (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2025). The total number of projects in the Global Development Project Pool has now exceeded 1,100, and the Innovative Training Base of the Center for Global Development, under the framework of the Global Development Initiative and the Young Leaders' House for Global Development, is operating in an orderly manner. China has provided more than 1,000 times of emergency assistance to more than 70 countries so far in 2018, targeting countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the South Pacific, Europe and other regions. A pertinent exemplification is furnished by the series of post-disaster reconstruction assistance measures that were provided following the historic floods in Pakistan in 2022.

China's leading role is also becoming more and more prominent, especially in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the BRICS, the Belt and Road Initiative and other international organisations and cooperation platforms. In 2013, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was established, and it currently has 110 members. The AIIB does not operate on the basis of military or political alliances, but rather with the aim of promoting infrastructure construction and economic development in the Asian region. It is hoped that all countries will participate in accordance with equal shares and rules, so as to jointly promote the prosperity of the Asian economy.

The Belt and Road Initiative has been identified as a pivotal platform for China to engage in global partnerships. Over the past 12 years, the Initiative has demonstrated a consistent adherence to the principle of "common cause, common construction and sharing". It has also facilitated an expansion in the areas and scope of cooperation, resulting in an enhancement in the level of collaboration. Furthermore, the Initiative has established a global partnership network involving over 150 countries, signifying its significant international impact (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2025). According to the most recent statistics from the China Customs, in 2024, China's trade in goods with the countries along the Belt and Road reached 22.1 trillion yuan, representing an increase of 6.4% in comparison with the previous year and constituting 50.3% of China's total import and export value. Among them, the import and export to ASEAN amounted to 6.99 trillion yuan, representing an increase of 9% year-on-year.

Furthermore, ASEAN has been the largest trading partner for three consecutive years, and the trade volume between the two sides has more than doubled compared with that of 10 years ago. Furthermore, Thousands of “big infrastructure” projects and “small but beautiful” projects have been carried out. These have effectively promoted the “hard connectivity” of infrastructure construction among countries, “soft connectivity” in rules and standards, and “heart connectivity” in humanistic exchanges. China has signed memorandums of understanding on cooperation in building the BRI with 52 African countries and the African Union, forming a cooperation network covering the whole of Africa continent. Following a decade of meticulous cultivation, the China-Latin America Forum has evolved into a pivotal platform for China and Latin America to engage in dialogues on an equal footing and carry out mutually beneficial cooperation.

The two sides have been proactive in promoting the in-depth integration of BRI with the development strategies of the Latin American side. Lots of projects such as the Qiankai Port and large-scale industrial parks have been completed sequentially. New cooperative endeavours have emerged in the domains of new energy, photovoltaic, electric vehicles, digital technology, cross-border e-commerce and other novel projects. The success of the China-Latin America Science and Technology Partnership Program and the China-Latin America Year of Cultural Exchanges has also contributed to the simultaneous warming of China-Latin America relation.

Recent years have seen an increased focus on green development and digital transformation as key aspects of the BRI. China has formally entered into intergovernmental accords on scientific and technological cooperation with approximately one hundred countries along the BRI, including initiating the Belt and Road Alliance of International Scientific Organizations, jointly formulating the China-Africa Digital Innovation Partnership Program, and organising the China-Latin America Science and Technology Innovation Forum. In the future, China will consider the progress of the new industrial revolution, which is being led by the Green Silk Road and empowered by the Digital Silk Road. The country will continue to strengthen cooperation in the fields of the digital economy and artificial intelligence with BRI members, to eliminate the digital divide and promote the construction of an open, fair, just and non-discriminatory environment for the development of global innovation.

To promoting investment in clean energy projects and facilitating the deployment of clean energy sources such as hydropower, wind power and photovoltaic power to

thousands of households, the Belt and Road International Alliance for Green Development has been set up. China has trained tens of thousands of environmental and climate professionals in more than 100 countries through the Green Silk Road Envoy Program (Xinhua News Agency, 2023).

5.2. Experience of China's non-aligned diplomacy

China's experience has demonstrated that adherence to a non-aligned foreign policy can have a multidimensional and far-reaching impact on domestic and foreign affairs.

It is evident that adherence to a non-aligned foreign policy is conducive to enhancing a country's strategic autonomy. The policy of non-alignment enables China to maintain an independent foreign relations agenda, thereby circumventing the potential for entanglement in conflicts with other nations that might be provoked by military alliances or ideological affiliations. Non-aligned principle enables China to exercise independent judgment on international affairs based on its national interests, such as maintaining policy flexibility in the U.S.-China dynamic, avoiding direct confrontation with the Western camp, and selectively participating in international agendas in areas such as climate negotiations and counter-terrorism cooperation.

Further, it is conducive to expanding China's space for economic cooperation. The non-aligned policy pursued by China has enabled the establishment of economic relations with numerous countries worldwide, unencumbered by the constraints of military alliances. The BRI is a pertinent case study for this argument. China has established cooperative relations with many countries along the route, which have different political systems, levels of economic development and cultural backgrounds. If China pursues an alliance policy, the extensive cooperation may be subject to the internal rules of the alliance and interests of other member states. The non-aligned policy enables China to collaborate with a broader range of countries in addressing global challenges, including climate change and public health crises. During the COVID-19 epidemic, China provided medical material assistance and shared its experience in combating the epidemic with a wide range of countries, including both developed and developing states, without having to consider the constraints of alliance relations.

The establishment of a global partnership network has also enabled China to achieve exponential growth in economic and trade cooperation. Its position of non-alignment

with specific countries has effectively eliminated the threshold for cooperation, thereby allowing China to deepen its technological cooperation with developed countries (e.g., the China-EU Investment Agreement) and to build infrastructure with emerging economies, forming an open pattern of “partnership rather than alliance”.

In addition, the non-alignment policy has enabled China to effectively circumvent the risk of being drawn into military conflicts between other countries. Obligations of mutual military assistance are often concomitant with alliances. It is a matter of historical record that a significant number of members of military alliances have been compelled to engage in combat when their allies have been engaged in war. By maintaining a stance of non-alignment, China mitigates the probability of its involvement in military conflicts abroad. In the context of the United Nations, the world’s largest international organisation, China’s policy of non-alignment and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence provide a robust foundation for its involvement in United Nations affairs. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China is committed to upholding the principles of equality, fairness and respect for sovereignty, active participating in various UN affairs, including peacekeeping operations, humanitarian relief and climate change. China dispatches peacekeeping troops in peacekeeping operations, follows the policy of non-alignment, and does not intervene in the internal conflicts of local countries, instead only serves to maintain local peace and stability.

Finally, the implementation of China’s non-aligned policy has provided a stabilising force for the world. In the context of today’s complex and volatile international situation, the non-aligned policy and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have contributed to China’s role as a stabilising force within the international community. In circumstances where international relations are marked by discordant interests, China has the capacity to assume a mediating role, guided by the tenets and policies that underpin its foreign relations. For instance, in Asia, China’s non-aligned policy and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have been instrumental in fostering regional stability. Asia is a geopolitically complex and culturally diversified region, characterized by significant disparities in the levels of development among its countries. China’s commitment to its non-aligned policy has been instrumental in averting the formation of military blocs in Asia, thereby mitigating the sources of regional tension.

China is a staunch advocate of the territorial integrity of its neighbouring nations, whilst concurrently maintaining a robust stance on the matter of its own maritime rights and interests. This approach has been instrumental in maintaining peace and

stability in the South China Sea region, safeguarding the maritime security and economic interests of countries within the region, and creating a favorable environment for the region's prosperity and development. Within the context of Northeast Asia, China encourages all parties to resolve the issue through peaceful negotiations and has been instrumental in promoting the denuclearization process of the Korean Peninsula and serving as a mediator between the United States and North Korea, thus making an important contribution to easing tensions in the North-East Asian region.

6. Conclusions

China's policy of "partnership rather than alliance" and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, represent the crystallization of China's diplomatic wisdom and constitute a significant contribution to the theory and practice of international relations on a global scale. The aforementioned policies and principles are predicated on the thoughts of peace, tolerance and harmony that are embedded in China's five-thousand-year-old culture, and are also in line with the development needs of the modern international community, and represented a new path for state-to-state diplomacy that China has explored through practice.

The decision by China to utilize the term "partnership" as opposed to "alliance" is founded upon its status as a developing nation. Despite the robust state of China's economic development, the nation is confronted with numerous challenges, including but not limited to developmental imbalances. China is committed to the promotion of shared development through the principle of mutual benefit and the principle of win-win cooperation. Conversely, the formation of alliances is intended to foster collaboration among certain nations while simultaneously creating a divide among others, that is not aligned with China's developmental objectives.

Furthermore, the formation of coalitions is incongruent with the long-standing tradition of Chinese diplomacy. The maintenance of an autonomous and pacific foreign policy constitutes a pivotal objective of Chinese diplomacy. Independence signifies that China determines its policies and positions based on the merits of the matter at hand, without being influenced by external forces. China's diplomatic tradition also includes openness and tolerance. Seeking common ground while reserving differences is the basis for realizing China's win-win cooperation. In the 30 years of diplomatic practice since the reform and opening up, China has never taken the road of

alliance, and it has created a favorable environment for international cooperation for China's economic development.

In fact, behind China's great economic achievements, the foreign policy of partnership rather than alliance has been instrumental. Economically, it has promoted global trade and cooperation; culturally, it has promoted multicultural exchanges and integration; and politically and security-wise, it has made indelible contributions to regional and world stability.

As the world landscape continues to evolve, China's partnership rather than alliance policy and five principles will continue to play an important leading role. They can serve as an important guide for countries to cooperate with each other and develop together in building a new type of international relations, addressing global challenges and improving the global governance system. It's for sure, building a more comprehensive global partnership network will still be a major task of great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era. China will continue to uphold its non-aligned policy and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and work hand in hand with all countries in the world to create a more peaceful, prosperous and harmonious world.

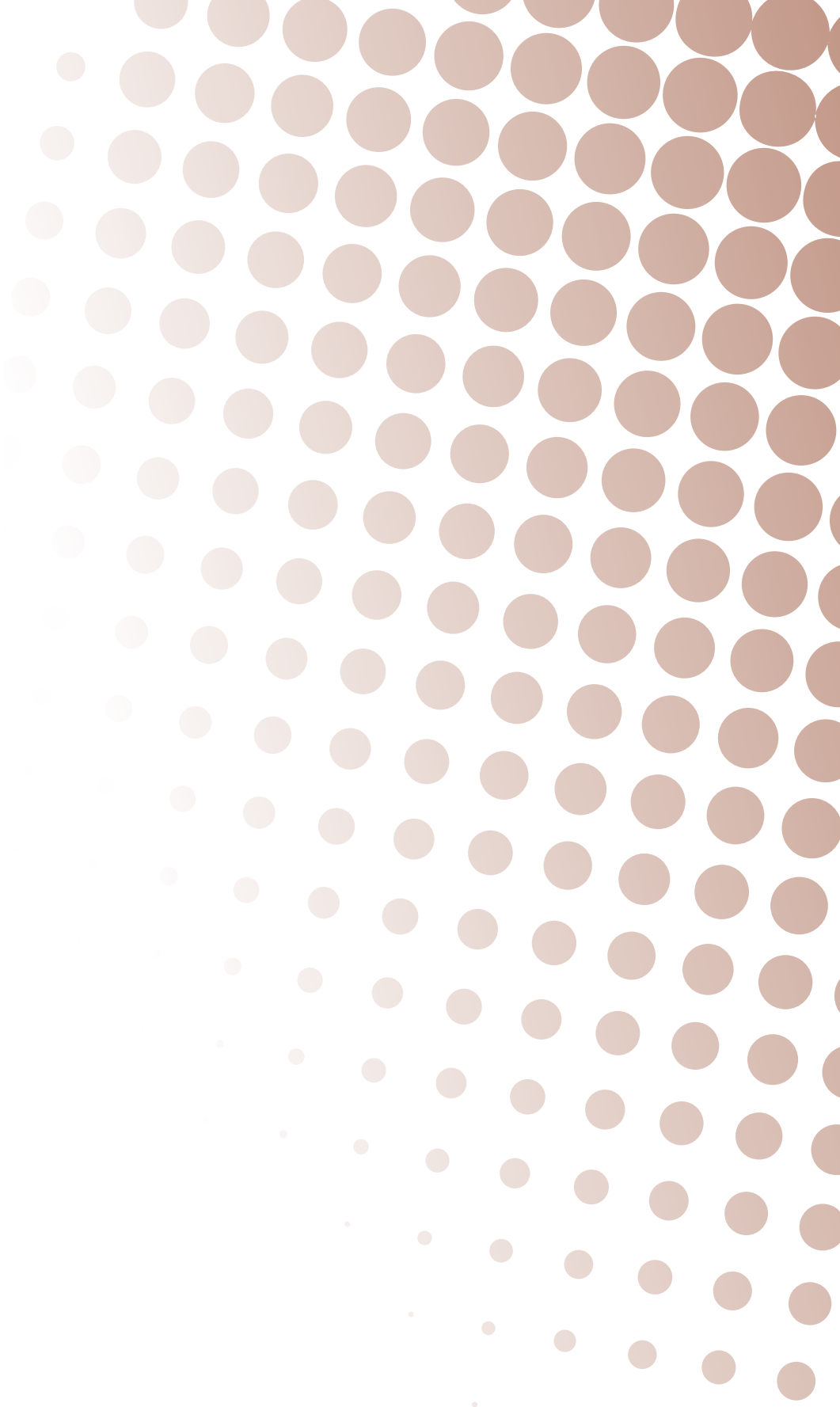
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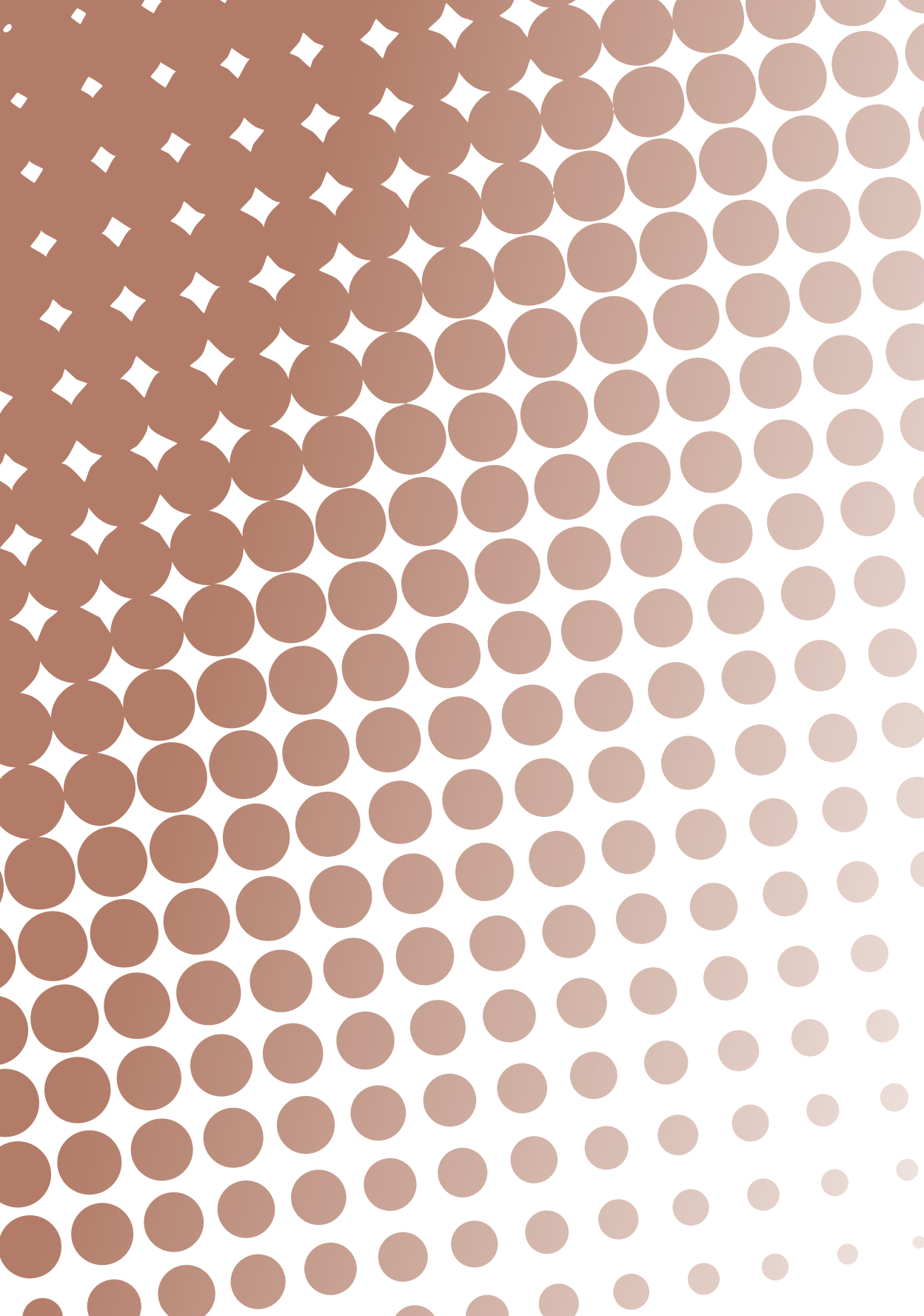
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**REGIONAL
PATHWAYS OF
BANDUNG:
NON-ALIGNMENT,
COOPERATION,
AND PRAGMATISM
IN ASIA**

INDIA'S REINCARNATION OF THE BANDUNG SPIRIT: BALANCING THE DRAGON WITH THE EAGLE AND THE BEAR¹

Ramachandra Byrappa²

Abstract

India was able to adopt non-alignment when China was still underdeveloped and compete with it. Today, however, China's GDP is almost five times that of India's. Its armed forces will soon match those of the United States in terms of military capability. This is forcing India to change its strategic posture and outlook; non-alignment is no longer viable. This was already clear during the prime ministership of Pandit Nehru, but it was during the tenure of his daughter, Indira Gandhi, that India took a steady step towards multi-alignment, seeking cooperation with powers like France and Russia, because Kissinger's US was in full romance with Communist China. During the Cold War, as France moved closer to China, Russia became the only partner; for several decades, India was in a uni-alignment with Russia. It was only under the current leadership of Prime Minister Modi that true multi-alignment was initiated, as relations with the United States became stronger and deeper. Nonetheless, non-alignment served a function for India when it began, and it still serves a purpose for India's diplomatic activity in the global South.

Keywords: *Bandung, non-alignment, multi-alignment, India, deglobalization, bi-globalization, Indian Balancer, supportive interdependencies*

¹ This article was written in 2024.

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1. The “Bandung” concept

The Bandung Spirit is open to different interpretations depending on the context in which it is examined: the motivations for convening the conference, the organisational structure, the camaraderie shared by the 29 heads of state and government present, and the aspirations articulated in the 10 Bandung Principles that emerged after the conference. This momentous event took place in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 and was convened by India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The uniqueness of this coalition of nations is that it represented South Asia alongside Indonesia, a combination that was no accident. In earlier discussions, Indonesian President Sukarno and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru contemplated the establishment of a comprehensive union between their respective regions.

According to historical accounts (UQAM, [Université du Québec à Montréal] n. d.): “As decolonisation moved through the region, Nehru sought to position India at the centre of a new Asian era. He even dreamed of creating and leading an Asian Union. To this effect, he organised the Inter-Asian Conference in New Delhi in 1947 and another a few years later.” The essence of the Bandung spirit had its roots in earlier movements and consistently conveyed a message of unity and solidarity. Ethnic and linguistic nationalism was seen as a potential threat to the newly sovereign nations. Addressing these divisions was seen as essential to promoting peace and effectively countering neo-colonial influences in Asia. As the *China Daily* put it: “The conference, also called the Bandung Conference, was the first gathering of Asian and African people to protect their newly earned independence and maintain world peace” (Xiwen, 2015).

Beyond the themes of unity, solidarity and peace, the conference sought to convey a crucial message to the global community. A key assertion made at Bandung was that the post-1945 world order was formulated without the participation of the Asian and African continents; it did not represent their interests, but rather reflected the agendas of the Soviet and Western powers. This order was the result of negotiations and cooperation between the colonial powers and the victors of the Second World War. In addition, participants expressed feelings of discrimination based on both their racial identities and their different levels of economic advancement as reasons why they were excluded from the groundwork for the construction of the UN.

The Bandung Conference was significant because it was the largest and first gathering of leaders from non-white nations. Its aim was to establish future platforms for dialogue and cooperation that would transcend systemic discrimination. A central objective of the Bandung Conference was to advocate for a just and equitable international order. The ten principles articulated at Bandung served as a framework for promoting a more equitable global system and creating an environment conducive to peaceful economic development among nations. Conceptually, this meant that hegemonic tendencies were incompatible with peaceful coexistence, and that without peaceful coexistence there could be no sustainable development.

The prevailing view of the members of the Bandung Conference was that the best way to deal with this situation was to avoid conflict. In the 1950s, the main source of discord was the Cold War, which pitted the Soviet bloc against the Western bloc. It is noteworthy that this East-West rivalry did not manifest itself within the borders of these two blocs, but rather unfolded in regions such as Africa, Asia and Latin America. Unfortunately, these continents became arenas of ideological struggle between capitalism and communism. The Bandung spirit proposed a solution summed up in the phrase “live and let live” (UNCRD, 2024), which later evolved into a policy of non-alignment towards the main players in the Cold War. In essence, this stance articulated the idea that “these are not our wars and we choose not to engage in them”. This perspective and policy eventually formed the basis for the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement. The spirit of Bandung became a reality with the creation of NAM in 1961 and later the creation of UNCTAD (and Group 77) in 1964, within the framework of the United Nations. Conceptually, therefore, the Bandung spirit reflects fairness and equality in international relations. In India’s case, this often-meant balancing belligerents to maintain overall fairness and equality in global politics.

2. India and the Non-Aligned Movement

For many, the spirit of Bandung was utopian, but for India it was the only way to avert gaping threats to its territorial integrity and peaceful development. The problem for India was not so much getting involved in third party conflicts, but what to do when directly threatened. Of course, making the international system fairer is one way of protecting one’s own interests. Prime Minister Nehru hoped that his unwavering commitment to the principles of Panchasheel, the five principles of peaceful co-existence

and the policy of non-alignment would, in time, pacify the international system. The tendency to settle disputes through war would become unethical. Pandit Nehru knew that his main adversaries might not necessarily be ethical or fair in their actions, but his aim was to create an international community large enough to put pressure on any potential belligerent or aggressor through non-cooperation. He hoped that the threat of isolation would deter countries from potential acts of aggression against India.

In the 1950s, India did not have so many enemies, just two, one nominal, Pakistan, and one real, China. Jawaharlal Nehru's policies suggested that he was portraying Pakistan as the main threat in the hope of avoiding open conflict with China. But he knew very well, deep in his lonely bosom, that China was a growing threat that India would one day have to confront. Nehru worried about China on several fronts. Given his fragile domestic situation, he was concerned that the communists in Bengal might join forces with communist China to launch a Maoist revolution that would destabilise India's fledgling democracy. He also had very few military resources to protect the long border with China and deal with separatist tensions within India. On top of all this, the colonial power had left India exhausted and economically depleted, barely able to stand upright as a country. India in the 1950s and 1960s was extremely vulnerable on all sides. For Nehru, the spirit of Bandung and the policy of non-alignment offered a glimmer of hope for managing India's international existence until it found its inner strength. Non-alignment can only work in the real world if you have real power and strength. Nehru's India had neither. Chairman Mao was well aware of India's vulnerability.

For decades India used non-alignment to mask these vulnerabilities. As Jawaharlal Nehru declared: "We do not intend to be a plaything of others" (The Economist, 2022). But this did not mean that India was not going to play with others when it deemed necessary. As the Economist explains: "In reality, India's commitment to non-alignment was never as pure as the traditionalists suppose. As needs arose, it has always got into bed with one power or another. During its border war with China in 1962 it turned to America for arms. After America grew close to Pakistan it veered so far towards the Soviet Union, whose ideology the Nehruvian elite adored, that non-alignment became a euphemism for anti-Americanism" (The Economist, 2022).

India's engagement with the Non-Aligned Movement and its position as a prominent member was complicated by its status as neither a dominant economic nor military power. The nation had a noticeable lack of influence within global governance struc-

tures, particularly the UN Security Council (The Economist, 2023). During the Cold War, India's inability to project itself as a future great power further undermined its credibility. While other non-aligned nations held India in high esteem, they often found it necessary to seek assistance from either the Soviet Union or the Western powers to meet their immediate economic and security needs. Although there was a general recognition of India's latent potential, the timetable for its realisation remained uncertain. In the face of the growing threat from China, for example, India found itself inadequately equipped for self-defence and dependent on one superpower or another, undermining the very notion of non-alignment. Despite being a suitable candidate to lead the non-alignment movement, India lacked the resources to play this role effectively and needed the backing of a supportive superpower. This support was provided by Russia through the Treaty of Friendship in 1978. Since then, three major structural changes have taken place. First, Communist China has emerged not only as a formidable competitor in a bipolar world, but also as the main threat to India's security and overall stability. Second, Russia has been relegated to a status just above that of a middle power and is increasingly perceived as being under Chinese influence. Third, the United States, which could potentially provide India with consistent support, remains reluctant to make long-term commitments. Visibly, India faces enormous challenges, but there may be elements that could tip the balance in its favour and put non-alignment back on the international agenda.

3. The challenge of a weaker Russia

Benno Zogg (2022), Head of Strategy and International Affairs for Security Policy at the Swiss Federal Department of Defence, articulated several compelling reasons for his belief that Russia's geopolitical influence in its immediate neighbourhood has declined. He argues that this decline has primarily benefited nations such as China and Turkey, which are gradually asserting themselves in areas that were once firmly within Russia's sphere of influence. Zogg identifies several factors that have contributed to this erosion of influence in the region. He argues that following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia's ability to act as a mediator has diminished significantly. In the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, for example, Russia's involvement has been notably limited, allowing Turkey to play a more prominent role. Zogg argues that Armenia has effectively been abandoned by Russia. He also notes that during the

recent border tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, there was a conspicuous absence of any moderating force, including Russia, to help de-escalate the situation. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated Russia's weakened position in the Caucasus and Central Asia, as countries in these regions increasingly recognise the need to diversify their security and economic strategies, perceiving Russia as vulnerable and relatively isolated. This shift is likely to lead to a reduction in trade and technological dependence on Moscow. Finally, Zogg argues that the potential for a Sino-Russian alliance to oppose Western interests runs counter to the aspirations of Central Asian states to become more diverse and interconnected. The recent collapse of the Assad regime is also cited by many as an indication of Russia's declining influence in the Middle East (EU Today, 2024).

From India's perspective, Russia's declining geopolitical influence poses several challenges. The importance of Russia for India lies in the expectation that the combined capabilities of Russia and Iran would outstrip those of its main adversaries, China and Turkey, in the Eurasian context. Prior to the conflict in Ukraine, there was uncertainty about Russia's true military capabilities. The ongoing war has revealed, and continues to reveal, several shortcomings within the Russian military establishment. First, Russia has focused disproportionately on improving its nuclear capabilities at the expense of its conventional forces. Second, its defence industry was inadequately prepared for the demands of warfare. Third, Russia has become increasingly dependent on technological support and supply chains from countries such as China, Turkey and Iran. Finally, it has become an unreliable arms supplier to other nations, struggling with production capacity issues. This evolving landscape has given an advantage to regional competitors, particularly Turkey and China, positioning them as more reliable arms suppliers both regionally and globally. Taken together, these factors suggest to India that its strategy of multi-alignment may be more precarious and vulnerable to disruption than previously assumed. While this situation may not change India's fundamental attitude towards Russia or the depth of their bilateral relationship, it does underscore the potential inadequacy of relying on multi-alignment with both Russia and the United States to safeguard India's interests against threats from nations such as China.

4. The challenges of an unbridled USA and multi-alignment

The United States is a crucial partner in India's multifaceted strategic orientation. Historically, America had the capacity to confront any adversary when its influence was at its peak. However, today's geopolitical environment has changed; the United States now appears to be limited to conflicts within a single theatre and lacks the capability to fight a two-front war. Moreover, the willingness to engage in military action raises significant concerns. The prospect of Donald Trump's re-election introduces further unpredictability, as US national interests could shift at any moment according to his interpretation of America's strategic priorities. Nevertheless, it is clear that the United States needs India as much as India needs the United States. Time magazine articulated this dynamic succinctly: "Just as India can't afford to lose Russia, the U.S. can't afford to lose India. They need each other, to face off against the ultimate challenger to America's global dominance, which is China. Russia neither has the ambition nor the capacity to mount such a challenge" (Chowdhury, 2022). But the future of Indo-US relations remains uncertain.

There are several confusing trends. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has become increasingly clear that the United States wants to take constructive steps to help democratic India develop as a counterweight to communist China. To this end, it has created a network of mini-laterals and multilateral groupings such as the Quad, I2U2 and IMEC, all of which form a chain of supportive interdependencies designed to strengthen India's position in both the Indo-Pacific and the Indo-Mediterranean (Leigh, 2023). The United States is careful not to promote an open alliance with India, but rather wants other major powers in the region to coordinate with India on economic and security issues. This appears to encourage multiple alignments, but leaves enough room for non-alignment as most of these fora are non-binding (Leigh, 2023). On the other hand, India has moved away from non-alignment. Prime Minister Modi has stopped attending the annual meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement and has made public statements about the nature of the US-India relationship that go beyond simple multi-alignment. On one occasion, "Mr Modi has described America and India as "natural allies", a heretical term for non-alignment traditionalists" (The Economist, 2022). I am not sure that the United States thinks the same of India because it seeks India's cooperation on a particular issue to help balance China

regionally and globally. This should not be confused with the beginning or appearance of a formal alliance.

Multi-alignment can produce beneficial results in different contexts, but it does not inherently ensure comprehensive security and stability over time. Just as individuals can age without rejuvenation, nations can stagnate without periods of revitalisation. As a result, multi-alignment is a dynamic and evolving condition that requires ongoing assessment, as the effectiveness of such alignments is heavily influenced by the characteristics of the partner nations. It is therefore understandable that India is more concerned with the potential decline of both Russia and the United States than with its own status. In a multi-alignment framework, the aspect of dependency warrants careful scrutiny, particularly from the perspective of the dependent nation.

Ideally, India's strength would equal or exceed that of the United States, but historical developments do not favour this outcome, at least in the foreseeable future. For millennia, India has functioned as an open civilisation, but colonial interventions – both Islamic and Western – have disrupted this system and undermined its civilisational resilience. As a result, the Indian system's capacity for self-regulation has deteriorated, and it may take decades to restore this balance. Until such restoration occurs, India may struggle to protect itself and its civilisational interests without external assistance. In the face of a determined China, India must cultivate equally determined and capable partners to serve as a hedge against potential Chinese aggression, which has recently posed significant threats to India. India's concerns therefore extend beyond its own security to the enduring strength of its partners, including the United States and Russia. A primary concern is the risk that either partner will experience a sharp decline or become overly dependent on China, which would exacerbate the precariousness of India's long-term security. The issue of preventing Russia's decline or dependence on China has taken on particular urgency following the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict in 2022. India is well aware of how China extinguished the European continent in just a few decades by draining it of its economic, technological and political vitality. The same can happen to Russia, the United States and any major country in the global South.

This complex and precarious scenario puts India in a difficult position in terms of multi-alignment and non-alignment. It must not only strategize and monitor its own national strength and development, but also closely monitor and, if necessary, manage the trajectories of its major partners, especially Russia and the United States.

This situation requires a careful balance between Russia's ambition to establish an alternative global order and the imperative of preserving the existing order to ensure that the United States remains robust within the system it established after 1945 to assert its hegemonic influence. This explains India's reluctance and lack of enthusiasm for building an alternative to the Western world order, preferring to advocate reforms within the international institutional framework rather than dismantling it in favour of a new structure of its own design. But unfortunately for India, things are moving faster than it can cope with.

5. Bi-Globalization and Deglobalization

It seems that India's structural adjustments came too late to have a lasting impact on its global positioning. Its adoption of multi-alignment can be attributed to two main factors. First, the Modi government, which took office in 2014, posited that non-alignment had lost its relevance in the contemporary context of India and its aspirations for a new identity. This shift in foreign policy was based on the belief that the bipolar dynamics characteristic of the Cold War had dissipated. Second, there was an expectation that the emerging temporary unipolar order would eventually give way to a multipolar framework characterised by fair international governance. Until 2018, when President Trump initiated a new tariff regime, and 2020, when tensions with China escalated along the border, these assumptions seemed robust. India operated on the premise that it could manage its relationship with a formidable China within a multipolar world that would ensure stability in bilateral interactions. However, this perspective has changed dramatically as India now finds itself balancing between explicit alignment and non-alignment. The international landscape has become increasingly precarious, driven by concerns over China's advances in military technology, particularly the integration of artificial intelligence with sophisticated nuclear capabilities. This evolving scenario places India in a precarious position, prompting a search for a new conceptual framework to navigate these complexities. To make matters worse for a still-developing India, far from its own particular concerns, the global system is shifting into a confusing and complicated state of bipolarity. As this crystallises, India will be forced to revisit the doctrine of non-alignment and adapt it to its new foreign policy challenges.

Furthermore, the transition from a unipolar global structure has led to several unforeseen consequences and challenges. In particular, the United States' decision to dismantle a system it had built after 1945 was unexpected. China was accused of ingratitude for trying to create an alternative framework. Meanwhile, India was taken aback by the rapid disintegration of this system. The mechanisms that had facilitated China's rise to global prominence over the past three decades were now either unavailable to India or shrouded in uncertainty. India has consistently argued for reform of global governance rather than its complete dissolution. A major concern for India is the near paralysis of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the only remaining operational system. The creation of the WTO in 1995, which heralded a new phase in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), is widely recognised as a pivotal moment in the globalisation process. It has taken India more than 20 years to make a systemic adjustment, and having done so, it is waking up to the fact that the WTO is being made obsolete by two nations that have benefited most from it.

There is widespread concern in various regions, including India, about the potential disintegration of the global economic institutional framework, which some perceive as the beginning of a new imperial order. This disintegration appears to be orchestrated with specific objectives in mind. A significant discourse is underway on whether we are witnessing a trend towards deglobalisation or a form of bi-globalisation. This debate is likely to continue for some time, but for those who anticipate such shifts, the outlines are beginning to emerge. A prominent Brazilian diplomat and international trade expert, Braz Baracuhy (2024), argues that we are moving away from the unipolar paradigm that characterised the 1990s and instead moving towards what he identifies as a distinct bipolar power structure. This emerging structure is different from its predecessors: "The global economy is being reshaped according to geopolitical fault lines. The post-Cold War economic globalization, driven by the logic of economic liberalization and free trade, has been replaced by geo-economic bi-globalization, underpinned by the logic of geopolitical competition." Baracuhy claims that the main catalyst for this new bipolarity and form of globalisation is the geopolitical competition between the United States and Communist China.

The Brazilian diplomat and foreign ministry official argues that the current situation will lead to significant upheavals before a new global order is established. According to him, geo-economic competition will intensify and the weaponisation of trade will become more pronounced. Strategic manoeuvring by major powers will effectively

reshape the international trade landscape, foster bloc loyalties and altering the existing global trade framework (Baracuh, 2024). Ultimately, this scenario will lead to the emergence of two distinct geo-economic spheres: one comprising the United States, the European Union, the G7 and their allies, and the other centred on China, which aims to unite parts of Eurasia and the Global South. For the purposes of this analysis, it is crucial to recognise that this emerging bipolarity will facilitate the rise of “non-aligned connectors” (IMF, 2024) who will seek to maintain fluid interactions between the two blocs. Baracuh (2024) stresses that the success of this initiative depends on the willingness of the blocs to remain open to such connections.

According to Bloomberg, the phenomenon of deglobalisation can be traced back to the mid-2010s, shortly after the financial crisis of 2007-2008. This era introduced a new concept into political discourse: “The US has relied on the vaguely defined idea of national security as part of that shift” (Martin, 2025). A comprehensive analysis by the Brookings Institution largely confirms Braz Baracuh’s findings, although it differs slightly from Bloomberg on the timeline, while agreeing on other aspects. The Brookings study explains: “The picture changed dramatically in 2018, when the United States announced the first set of tariff increases targeting several countries, but especially China. Eventually these tariff increases lead to a tariff war between the United States and China, the world’s two largest economies in 2018 and 2019” (Goldberg & Reed, 2023).

This development coincided with the US decision to block the appointment of new judges to the WTO’s Appellate Body, rendering the arbitration process ineffective (Goldberg & Reed, 2023). This was followed in 2022 by the release of the National Security Strategy, which the US administration could potentially use to impose restrictions on dual-use products (Goldberg & Reed, 2023). Initially, these changes did not stop globalisation, but rather led to a redistribution and an increase in trade flows (Goldberg & Reed, 2023). In the next phase, the US began to use the interdependence of its allies to restrict their exports (Goldberg & Reed, 2023). This approach can be characterised as a system of imperial interdependence, involving a policy of trade between trusted partners (friend shoring). The authors of the Brookings report assert: “we may be entering an era where the future of trade and globalization is shaped top-down by politically motivated governments rather than by market forces” (Goldberg & Reed, 2023). The United States is well placed to adopt this strategy because its export sector accounts for only 10% of its GDP, compared with 35% for

smaller nations (Goldberg & Reed, 2023). This structural aspect gives added weight to countries that have large, strong and dynamic national markets. This means that three countries will stand out from the rest of the world: the United States of America, Communist China and India.

5. The Indian Balancer

The main implications of deglobalisation and bi-globalisation are a shift from global institutional governance to a framework characterised by bipolar and spherical arrangements. The Sinosphere and the Western Sphere are expected to gradually develop a set of operational guidelines. Smaller states outside these spheres may find it difficult to navigate the complexities of both, and face the constant threat of violating the rules established by either side. Conversely, the circumstances will be different for middle powers and India, which occupies a unique position. In the absence of cooperative efforts between them, middle powers are unlikely to establish a self-determined rules-based system, but they may be able to mitigate some of the adverse effects associated with the bipolar spherical structure of the global economy on a case-by-case basis. This dynamic could also foster a significant increase in economic interactions among middle powers.

In the context of a possible fragmentation of the global trading system, national markets, especially those characterised by large populations and rising purchasing power, are expected to gain in importance on the international stage and to emerge as key drivers of economic activity. This situation suggests that India's status as the fastest growing economy among the five major nations, coupled with its expanding market, may lead it back to a non-aligned position after its experience of multi-alignment. Projections suggest that India is likely to become the third largest economy by 2040, with considerable market potential and a prime destination for investment. A consumer base of 1.5 billion people is a factor that neither China nor the United States can ignore. As a result, this demographic reality will force both nations to consider India's unique needs. India is poised to use its market power to influence the behaviour of these two competing powers.

Moreover, as a developing country, India continues to rely on the support of both the United States and China for its growth. China's aggressive post-2020 stance has made India acutely aware of its reliance on Chinese inputs to support the production

of finished goods, given the high degree of integration in global supply chains. Chinese multinationals are also a good source of much-needed investment (Sharma, 2024). At the same time, India is seeking cooperation with Western nations, particularly the United States. Despite tensions with China, India does not wish to categorise its trans-Himalayan neighbour as an adversary. This perspective encourages a degree of equidistance as India seeks to mitigate the great power rivalry between China and the United States. An important motivation for this stance is India's desire to prevent the resurgence of conflict in Asia. The concept of non-alignment could be revived in the form of India acting as a global balancer.

P.S. Raghavan, who currently serves as Chairman of India's National Security Advisory Board and is a distinguished fellow at the Vivekananda International Foundation, brings a wealth of experience and insight to discussions of India's foreign policy. Having retired from the Indian Foreign Service in 2016, Raghavan has a unique vantage point from which to analyse and critique India's evolving stance on non-alignment and multi-alignment in the contemporary geopolitical landscape. He points to several structural elements that should tilt India towards a reconfigured non-alignment. The threat from China is real, he says, but India should not count on the extension of the US security umbrella for a variety of reasons (Raghavan, 2017, pp. 339–340). Raghavan reminds us that “Non-aligned countries have, at times, aligned more closely with one or the other superpower, when their national interests dictated it” (Raghavan, 2017, p. 328). In essence, he is saying that Indira Gandhi's non-alignment is no different from Narendra Modi's multi-alignment or strategic autonomy. He goes on to argue that what is actually driving India closer to the United States is the potential danger of a close Russia-China partnership. If this happens, it has the potential to change the entire global dynamic to India's disadvantage (Raghavan, 2017, pp. 338–339.) Fortunately for India, he argues, the West is even more worried about China. This could give India some room and flexibility to regain a geopolitical space of non-alignment (Sramana, 2024). Raghavan's message is that the West definitely needs India for its geopolitical needs, but this may not help India manage the China threat (Mohan, 2024). So instead of hedging against the China threat with a hallowed multi-alignment, India should become a Balancer between the new Cold War rivals. P.S. Raghavan would probably call this the New Non-Alignment (NNA).

I believe the US is ready for NNA. What became evident with the Biden administration is that when it comes to the new world order, the United States is neither

totalitarian nor totalizing, it wants to consolidate the Western sphere but beyond that it remains flexible and prone to adaptability. In an interview given to the Washington Post in January 4, 2023, Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan implies that: "What matters now is fluidity and adaptability, as the United States seeks to work with amorphous "middle powers" in addition to traditional treaty allies" (Ignatius, 2023). Furthermore, the national security advisor added: "Countries don't want to choose, and we don't want them to. Rather than trying to divide the world, we are seeking an affirmative agenda - infrastructure, climate, food security and digital rules" (Ignatius, 2023). What this statement clearly illustrates is that not only is there room for non-alignment, but it is also actively sought after. And who better to undertake this than a country like India.

6. Conclusions

In the years following the Bandung Conference, particularly in 1962, Maoist China launched an attack on India, violating the principles established at the Conference and undermining a millennia-old understanding that these two great civilisations would refrain from conflict. More recently, in 2020, India, a nation still wrestling with development challenges, was alarmed by a significant military incursion by China along its borders, particularly at a time when India was grappling with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. This incident further eroded the trust that had been cultivated over many decades. While India is committed to peaceful development, the threat posed by China has led it to adopt a strategy of multi-alignment. This shift has been influenced by the perception that its traditional ally, Russia, is not only weakening but increasingly dependent on China. As a result, India has sought to strengthen its security ties with the United States. However, India is now realising that a United States that has rendered the rules-based international order all but ineffective may not be adequately responsive to its security needs. This situation has led some foreign policy analysts to suggest that India should reconsider a non-alignment strategy that could position it as a global balancer between China and the West.

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THE THAI-CHINA TRADE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE U.S. ALLIANCE, THE BANDUNG CONFERENCE AND THE OBSTACLES FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Apicha Chutipongpisit¹

Abstract

Thai-China trade developed for several centuries through the tribute system until the end of the Second World War. However, Thai-China trade declined following the rise of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Due to growing Thai-U.S. relations, Thailand relied more on the "Free World" countries for foreign investments and international trade while terminating its imports and exports with China. Although Thailand participated in the Bandung Conference in 1955 and recognized the Final Communiqué which was based on respect for sovereignty, peaceful co-existence and mutual interests, the outcome of the Bandung Conference did not lead to the promotion of economic cooperation between Thailand and China due to the Thai policy against communist countries. Until the establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1975, the Thai-China trade revived and continued to grow from the Open-Door Policy Era which encouraged China to participate in the "Free World" economy.

Keywords: *The Bandung Conference, Economic Cooperation, Thai-China trade, The Cold War, Thai-US relations*

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1. Introduction

The year 2025 represents the 50th Anniversary of the Thai-China diplomatic relationship which was established on 1 July 1975. The studies on Thai-China relations during the Cold War Period tend to focus on Thai-China relations post-1975 when the Prime Minister of Thailand, M. R. Kukrit Pramoj, visited the People's Republic of China to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries (Busbarat 2024; Chambers, 2005; Garson, 1984; Kosolthanakul, 1993; Shee, 1981; Yong, 1993). The Thai-China friendship stemmed from the normalization of China-U.S. relations in the early 1970s which forced Thailand to adjust their foreign policy towards China even despite their divergent political ideologies. With ties spanning fifty years, the two countries benefited from mutual economic interests encouraged by a free trade policy and the promotion of foreign direct investment. In the late twentieth century, the Sino-Thai capitalists began to invest their fortune in China in response to the economic transformation to capitalism and the Open Door Policy led by Deng Xiaoping (Naughton, 1993; Moore, 2002). Thai-China relations continued to grow in the twenty-first century through the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Cooperation promoting several projects to enhance private investments and infrastructure. With the new phase of China's policy focusing on Southeast Asian region, Thailand became one of the key markets for a range of Chinese goods and a natural resource for Chinese investments (Lanteigne, 2020; Mark, 2012; Wong, 1995).

However, the Thai-China relationship, especially from an economic perspective, had emerged and grown over several centuries before 1975. From the thirteenth century, the tributary system was an opportunity for Siam to send several kinds of goods such as pepper, rice, sugar, tobacco, sappanwood, ivory, tin and other forest products, to supply the China market (Cushman, 1993; Ng, 2017; Viraphol, 1977). The Siamese kings sent an envoy to China every three years to offer valuable tributes and ask for a permission to trade with tax exemption in South China ports such as Amoy, Ningpo, Haikow, Shanghai and Fuzhou. In addition, the presentation of tributes led the Chinese Emperor to acknowledge the Siamese king's authority (Hamashita, 1988). The Thai-China tribute trade expanded until the middle of the nineteenth century and then dissolved due to the war between China and British followed by western interference in China and several Chinese rebellions in the 1850s and the 1860s. Despite this instability in China, the Thai-China tribute trade continued to grow through

transshipment trade via Hong Kong which became the British Crown Colony in 1842 (Hayes, 2012). In response to the transformation of the Siamese economy into a free trade system in the mid-1850s, Hong Kong's function as an entrepôt port benefited Siam with the opportunity to ship high-demand goods for redistribution to the China market.

The growth of Thai-China trade during the high noon of capitalism in Asia continued until the end of the Second World War (1939-45). It was challenged by the beginning of the Cold War Period which influenced the separation of democratic and communist groups. This article will examine the effects of the Cold War on Thai-China trade in the second half of the twentieth century, a period marked by Mao Zedong's establishing of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949 while Thailand sided with the U.S. for military and economic supports. Although Thailand did not proclaim a suspension of the Thai-China relationship due to a difference of political ideologies, the two countries nevertheless struggled to sustain their mutual economic interests. In addition, this article explores the story of the Bandung Conference in 1955 which signified a crucial development in Afro-Asian cooperations after the Second World War. Delegates from twenty-nine countries participated in the conference in Bandung, Indonesia from 18-24 April 1955. Although the objectives of the countries in joining the conference varied, they accepted the Five Principles to achieve a peaceful co-existence, the building of world peace and the promotion of mutual economic interests (Redding, 1956). They also agreed to respect national sovereignty and to oppose any intervention of imperialist countries in the affairs of other countries (Appadorai, 1955). However, the success of this economic cooperation remains questionable. The story of the Thai-China economic cooperation after the Bandung Conference will be used as a case study to demonstrate the potential of the Bandung Conference to foster economic cooperation, especially between countries with different political ideologies.

2. The Bandung Conference 1955 and the Formation of Economic Cooperation

The Bandung Conference started with five leading countries, Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan, which joined the meeting in Columbo in April 1954 to find ways to establish world peace (Appadorai, 1955; Wilson, 1967a). They subsequently

organized a conference in 1955 with the main objectives to form a common understanding of national sovereignty and the extension of peaceful co-existence among new emerging countries in Asia and Africa (Mustaq, 1955; Wilson, 1967b). Twenty-nine participants agreed with the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence presented by Zhou Enlai (Shao, 1979). The principles became a framework for all nations to share their responsibility for peacebuilding, especially a respect of boundaries and a recognition of territorial integrity and sovereignty. In addition, the participants emphasized the importance of becoming independent countries which existed without any interference from other major powers. All countries agreed not to use military force to dominate another's territory or strike against other countries and to strive towards arms limitation.

The Bandung Conference, however, not only developed an understanding among new emerging countries which had different political systems, multi-racial populations and diverse cultures, but also urged economic cooperations. The participants in the conference were representatives from underdeveloped countries which had suffered from colonial systems and wars for many decades and now needed to survive by themselves (Zhou, 1955a). From the high noon of capitalism in the 1870s until the Second World War, many countries were exploited for their resources and became exporters of primary products to industrial countries. With the global economic structure setting up the Asian and African colonies as a base for primary sources supply, these colonies were unable to benefit from their high demand products. In return, they relied on industrial goods imported from Europe or other colonies which contributed to a low level of industrialization. In addition, several countries had large populations and their daily life was based on agricultural cultivation and self-sufficient systems. This led to a lack of know-how in terms of becoming an industrial country, low income and poor standards of living. These countries needed, therefore, economic cooperations to increase their level of industrialization level by importing technologies for production and to promote international trade.

During the Bandung Conference, the issue of economic problems in Asian and African countries was raised and the participants recognized it as urgent. They now needed an exchange of technical experts and knowledge and the supports of high technology equipment to increase the quantity and quality of their productivity. However, two obstacles to these changes were raised by the participants in the conference. First of all, the assistance of technologies for production posed a severe challenge as par-

ticipating countries in the conference were new emerging countries which lacked the knowledge and technology for industrial productions. It would be difficult, therefore, to rely on only intra-regional support and economic cooperation. Secondly, the Asian-African countries lacked funds for developing their economies. To increase productivity and potential to compete with western industrialised countries, they had to rely on significant financial aid to achieve this success.

These two factors led the participants to discuss a suitable agreement for their economic cooperation. They needed to increase their production for export, one of the major sources of income. To overcome the two obstacles, some participants such as Thailand, the Philippines, Pakistan and Turkey proposed that the Asian-African countries should rely on western countries and other countries outside their regions while Japan and Pakistan pointed out that support from international organizations would be beneficial and helpful for the Asian-African countries to develop local industry (Zhou, 1955c). Some participating countries such as India and Indonesia agreed to procure financial and technological assistance from outside their regions, but Burma opposed the procurement of supports from the U.S.. As can be seen from the discussion on this economic issue during 19-20 April 1955, some participants were wary of western interference as in the colonial period, especially the U.S. which now introduced several economic supporting mechanisms to help the new emerging countries. The participating countries, however, attempted to retain their territorial integrity, sovereignty and self-determination even while the economic supports remain necessary for their countries.

For China, Zhou Enlai agreed with the idea of intra-regional support. He pointed out that the economic assistance for Asian-African countries would bring benefit to all nations, but it should be based on a principle of self-reliance and primarily procured by Asian and African people who knew and were familiar with the nature of their regions. The local experts, trainers, knowledge and technology obtained locally were more suitable for their countries than that of western countries. Some economic assistance, however, maybe come from inter-regional countries but it was agreed that the intra-regional dimension should remain the first priority. China, therefore, offered to provide some industrial equipment, technology and experts to support their companions. The productivity of Chinese industries after the proclamation of the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957) considerably increased, especially iron, steel, cotton cloth and grains, in response to a major aim of China's economic development to become

an industrial country (Zhou, 1955a; Chai, 2011). China's proposed supports appealed to many delegates who expected to rely on economic supports to develop their economy during the beginning of Cold War Era (Zhou, 1955c).

In addition to industrial support, Zhou Enlai proposed a plan to develop Asian-African intra-regional trade. He pointed out that to overcome the imperialist monopoly with cheaper price production in the markets and the manipulation of the price of goods and raw materials, the participating countries should conclude an agreement or contract to achieve mutual interests for Asian-African nations while preventing western exploitation and the return of colonial dominance in their regions (Zhou, 1955a; Zhou, 1955b). In addition, China was affected by the economic blockade during the Korean War (1950-53) as it took sides with North Korea and the Soviet Union. The cooperation with the communist countries to invade the Korea Peninsular led to a decline in foreign trade between China and western countries including other pro-democracy countries (Shen, 2020). To escape from the containment of the U.S. allies, Zhou Enlai concentrated his effort in promoting a new foreign policy after 1953 which was based on the expansion of areas for peace and self-determination without western interference while encouraging China trade with Asian-African countries to revive the Chinese economy which had largely relied on the Soviet Union (Shu, 2007; Tao, 2011).

India, Indonesia and Burma agreed with Zhou's proposal which was seen as beneficial to all participating countries who would begin to trade with China. These countries also called for a removal of an embargo on trade with China due to the conflict between the democratic and the communist sides. Although the sponsoring delegates in the conference called for an agreement to trade with China, and Burma emphasized that China was an opportunity for all nations as it was a huge country with a large population, a high demand market and a variety of cheap price products, delegates from Thailand, Turkey and the Philippines who were United Nations members and pro-U.S. nations, were unable to promote intra-regional trade with China (Zhou, 1955c). The delegate from the Philippines, nevertheless, explained that he did not oppose other countries establishing commercial relations with China. In addition, the Philippines would implement a certain policy to promote trade with China such as sending trade delegations and arranging trade fairs or exhibitions.

Although the delegates had different opinions and were forced to position themselves according to their nations' stance during the Cold War Period, a consensus

was reached to promote industrial support and foreign trade among the participating countries (Zhou, 1955c). The economic cooperation was included in the Final Communiqué of the Asian–African Conference as follows:

1. All participating countries agreed to rely on both intra-regional economic support and that of inter-regional countries. They agreed not to rely solely on support from the U.S. or the Soviet Union, but to be open to support from other industrialized countries.
2. The participating countries agreed to share and provide technical assistance and experts. They also encouraged the participating countries to process their raw materials before exporting.
3. The participating countries attempted to urge the United Nations and other international organizations for financial assistance.
4. All participating countries agreed to promote intra-regional trade and the exchange of trade delegations and groups of businessmen. They also agreed to arrange trade fairs and exhibitions to promote import-export trade in the Asian and African regions.
5. The participating countries agreed to encourage the establishment of Liaison Officers in their countries for the exchange of information and ideas relating to mutual economic interests. They also agreed to the establishment of national and regional banks and insurance companies.
6. The participating countries paid attention to a review of shipping freight rates and called for collective action to cope with this problem. This included a study of the railway freight of the transit trade which should be made more reasonable.

The conclusion of economic cooperation to achieve mutual interests among the participating countries was the result of the Bandung Conference. Questions remained, however, as to the extent of its success. Intra-regional support among Asian and African countries was clearly challenging as the development and transition of agricultural countries into industrialised ones requires large capital and technological knowledge. Besides, the political pressure of the conflict between democracy and communism during the peak period of the Cold War Era in the 1950s and the 1960s made it difficult for the Asian and African countries to cooperate with other countries which had different political ideologies. The case study of Thai–China commercial relations

during this period will demonstrate how this challenging time influenced the success of the economic agreement of the Bandung Conference.

3. Thai-China relations 1945-1955: Political Situation, Foreign Policy and Economic Stagnation

Thai-China economic relations emerged over several centuries from the thirteenth century. Trade between the two countries expanded through the tribute system. The Siamese kings sent their royal envoy to China to pay respect to the Chinese Emperor with valuable goods and asked for permission to trade in South China ports. Due to these warm relations, the Chinese Emperor allowed the Siamese elites and the Chinese migrant traders who were employed to manage the royal junks to trade in several coastal ports. In addition, the Chinese Emperor gave a tax exemption for goods imported from Siam. The Chinese privileges offered to traders from Siam resulted in the expansion of the Siam-China trade. China finally became one of the most important markets for Siam until the middle of the nineteenth century.

The First Opium War (1839-42) was followed by wars with western countries and Japan forced China to become a semi-colony. Although the Chinese Emperor suffered from the western intervention, especially with the agreement of extra-territoriality, an abolition of the royal monopoly and the state control on foreign trade and requests for various concession areas along the eastern coast of China, these problems finally led China to become a new emerging free trade market in East Asia. The western firms began to establish their branches in the first five Treaty Ports and operated their business by linking with headquarters in Europe and America. After the Second Opium War (1856-60), China was forced to open several Treaty Ports along the Yangtze River and eastern areas in inland China. The opening of Treaty Ports contributed to a transformation of the Chinese economy from self-sufficiency and state monopoly to free trade led by foreign private traders. In addition to China's economic transformation, the establishment of Hong Kong in 1842 was another factor that contributed to the growth of Chinese trade. A variety of goods was shipped to Hong Kong for redistribution to local markets in China. In turn, the establishment of western firms contributed to an increase in exports from China to supply the global markets.

For Siam, the abolition of royal control over foreign trade and the economic transformation to the free trade system in the mid-1850s resulted in an increase in the

Siamese exports to China through Hong Kong such as rice, the most important commodity, paddy, sugar, pepper, cotton, teak plank, timber, sapanwood, rosewood, ironwood, teel seed, dried mussels, tin, horse skin, deerskin, and deer horn (Commercial Report from Her Majesty's Consul-General in Siam, 1870, 1878, 1882, 1883). Although Hong Kong was a redistributing centre in the Siam-China trade route, small amounts of these goods were shipped directly to ports in China. In turn, Siam imported some commodities from China such as tea, paper, umbrellas, mat, silk, tiles, earthenware, crockery ware, brass and copper ware (Commercial Report from Her Majesty's Consul-General in Siam, 1864, 1865, 1870, 1882).

From the mid-1850s to the 1910s, Siam exported several kinds of goods to China while importing some goods for daily life from China in smaller amounts. The trend of the Siam-China trade changed during the Interwar Years in the 1920s and the 1930s. In the 1920s, China became a more important market for the Siamese import-export trade. It ranked fourth compared to the top three major Asian markets for Siam; Hong Kong, British Malaya and the Straits Settlements and British India. The value of Siam-China trade during this decade was more than that of the Netherlands India and Japan which represented other centres of the Asian trade (Statistical Year Book of the Kingdom of Siam, 1924-27, 1929). The total value of Siam-China trade increased considerably in the 1930s. Rice and teak were the most important exports from Siam to China during this decade while imports from China consisted of foodstuff, non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages, textiles, unprocessed raw materials and tobacco, products that were becoming more important for Thai people (Statistical Year Book of the Kingdom of Siam, 1931-39). This led to larger amounts of imports from China to Siam compared to exports from Siam to China in the 1920s and the 1930s. Thai-China economic relations continued until the Second World War. Although Thailand was forced to side with the Japanese, providing raw materials to supply the Japanese military and concentrating on trade with Japan, resulting in an increase of around two to three folds in both imports and exports during the war years (Statistical Year Book of the Kingdom of Siam, 1940-55), the Thai-China trade continued to grow due to a rising demand for foodstuff and strategic goods in South China during the wartime.

After the Second World War ended in 1945, Thai-China economic relations, however, did not revive due to the civil war between the CCP and the KMT from 1945 to 1949. During this critical period in China, Thailand, with its new foreign policy

to side with the Allies, began to establish a good relationship with the U.S. (Suthiwart-Narueput, 1980). Thereafter, the Second Phibun Government, formed again in 1948, promoted a nationalist policy and a strong resistance to the communists (Tan, 2018). With this new policy, Thailand finally became a part of the anti-communist movement and was later promoted to be the U.S. base to confront the expansion of the communism in Southeast Asia in the 1950s.

The amplification of the communist threat had an impact on Thai-China economic relations, especially after the proclamation of the People's Republic in October 1949. While Thai-Japan trade expanded within the U.S.-Japan relations, Thailand began to focus on another trade route with Taiwan, another U.S. alliance in East Asia. Thailand also traded with other U.S. partners and neutral countries such as India, Ceylon, British Malaya, North Borneo, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines and western European countries (Statistical Year Book of the Kingdom of Siam, 1945-55). During 1948-55, the value of imports from Taiwan to Thailand increased considerably from 800,000 baht to 32,131,545 baht in 1950 and 124,301,606 baht in 1955 (Statistical Year Book of the Kingdom of Siam, 1945-55). For exports, Thailand discontinued rice and teak exports to China. A large amount of rice was shipped to Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia and British Malaya while teak was shipped to Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Ceylon, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and the United States.

During 1948-55, the decline in importance of the China market for Thailand was evident, even though a demand for a variety of goods rose steadily due to its increasing population, as Thailand played its role in the 'anti-communist alliance'. As can be seen from the Statistical Year Book of the Kingdom of Thailand, there is no record of the Thai-China trade from the mid-1940s (Statistical Year Book of the Kingdom of Siam, 1945-75). In addition, the pro-U.S. policy led the Phibun government to sign an agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation and Military Assistance with the United States in 1950, demonstrating that Thailand had taken sides with the U.S. (Suthiwart-Narueput, 1980; Kosolthanakul, 1993). Consequently, the continuity of the Thai-China trade became impossible.

While the U.S. influence became stronger, the Thai-China economic relationship declined as the Phibun government approached the Nationalist government of China led by Chiang Kai-shek for diplomatic normalization in 1946. The Phibun government was anxious that the Nationalist government, one of the five powerful nations, would veto Thailand to be a member of the United Nations as Thailand had been a

supporter of Japan during the Second World War. To normalize the relationship with Chiang Kai-shek, the Phibun government had to remove the anti-Chinese policy. The Phibun government promised to offer a quota for Chinese migration, reinstate the rights for Chinese migrants in Thailand as they were prior to the Second World War, give permission to open Chinese schools and allow the Chinese to establish their own society (Kosolthanakul, 1993). However, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949 forced Thailand to choose from one of the 'two Chinas.' The Phibun government continued to side with the Republic of China while refusing to recognize the People's Republic of China.

4. Thai-China Economic Cooperation after the Bandung Conference: Obstacles and Possibilities

The termination of Thai-China trade in the mid-1840s which lasted up until the mid-1970s leads to the interesting question as to why the positive interactions during the conference and an agreement to establish the economic cooperations did not lead to the resumption of Thai-China economic relations after 1955.

Essentially, the Thai government's policy to oppose the communist movement and the normalization of Thai-Taiwan in the late 1940s contributed to the Thai government's decision to terminate their trade with the People's Republic of China. In the first half of the 1950s, however, the Thai government implemented a stronger policy to side with the U.S. as can be seen from the participation in the Korean War (1950-53). The Thai government sent troops to wage war against North Korea when the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, invaded South Korea in order to reunify the Korean Peninsula. The Thai government responded to the United States' policy to fight against the communists and agreed to isolate China by implementing a ban on Chinese trade (Zhai, 2000). For China, Mao Zedong was eager to side with the Soviet Union to support Kim Il Sung as the Chinese government wanted to fight against 'the American threat' (Mark, 2012). Moreover, Mao did not want the U.S. to defeat the communist troops in the Korean War as the U.S. might use the Korean Peninsula, supported by the troops in Taiwan, to fight against Mainland China (Lynch, 2004). In addition to the hostility between Thailand and China in the Korean War, the Thai government joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 by partnering with the U.S., Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Phil-

ippines and Pakistan to create a bloc and encourage military cooperation to oppose the communist countries. For Thailand, the establishment of SEATO was beneficial as the military aid from western countries would boost confidence in countering the expansion of the communist movement in neighbouring countries.

The strong position taken by the Thai government to oppose the communists and the establishment of friendly relations with Taiwan contributed to less enthusiasm to deal with China during the Bandung Conference. Although Zhou Enlai emphasized that China after the Korean War focused on establishing a peaceful co-existence policy with the new emerging countries, the Thai government continued their reliance on the United States, especially for military support. In addition, the United States had stronger potential to provide technological support, experts and know-how for industrialization compared to the participating countries which, in fact, had to rely also on outside regions for support. As witnessed at the conference, the Thai delegate pointed towards the necessity of a reliance on the American technology and other economic support, but this was rejected by some countries such China, Burma and other neutral countries who were anxious in terms of further political interventions from the U.S..

After the conference ended, with no encouraging economic cooperation confirmed among the participating countries, Thailand relied more on U.S. support which was expected to help develop the Thai economy. The new military government after the 1957 Coup d' état led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat brought Thailand under a dictatorship. During the Sarit regime from 1959 to 1963, the military government strongly relied on both economic and military support from the U.S.. The U.S. government sent economic experts to Thailand to survey economic problems and provided financial support to develop the Thai economy from an agricultural to an industrial country (Suehiro, 1989). With the U.S. projects, the Thai economy gradually changed and followed the capitalistic policies of the U.S.. The Sarit government began to encourage the roles played by private traders while reducing the number of state-owned enterprises which were assumed to be obstacles to the capitalist system. The government also welcomed the FDI from the U.S., European countries and Japan to invest in Thailand. In response to the capitalist policy, the Sarit government implemented the First Economic Development plan during 1961-66. Following the American experts' suggestions, the Thai government employed several measures to encourage Thailand to become a capitalist country. One such example was the government' prohibition of state participation in commercial and industrial activity, turning to concentrate

instead on infrastructure construction. The government also encouraged FDI by providing tax exemptions and promoting import-substituting industrialisation. Furthermore, with the high capacity of the Thai agricultural sector, the government fostered agricultural productivity for exports, especially rice and other processed products.

While Thailand was receiving the U.S.'s economic support, its relationship with China became worse as the Chinese government began to urge the 'People's War' in the third world in the mid-1960s (Garson, 1984). In addition, Thailand strongly promoted an anti-communist policy along with the U.S.. This later led the two countries to sign the Thanat-Rusk Joint Communiqué in 1962. This treaty led Thailand to become a close partner with the U.S. in fostering the anti-communist movement while the U.S. pledged to send troops to Thailand should the communists invade the country. The relationship between Thailand and the U.S. made the Chinese government hostile towards Thailand, especially when Thailand helped the American troops to wage war with the leftists in Vietnam during the 1960s-the 1970s. On the other hand, the Thai government was unhappy with China's support for the Communist Party of Thailand to protest against the military government in 1965. The communist movement in Thailand made the Thai government believe that they were supported by China as they employed a similar strategy to Mao's revolution, especially with the introduction of guerilla warfare. Furthermore, the communists in Thailand established several left-wing organizations in Beijing which were encouraged to overthrow the military government. In addition to China's support for the communist party in Thailand, the government in China promoted the idea of revolution in other Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia. This led to hostility between Thailand and China throughout the 1960s.

The clash between Thailand and China in the 1960s continued into the mid-1970s. This led to a failure of the Bandung Conference to establish economic cooperation between the two countries. Thailand relied on the economic support of the U.S. which was useful to assist Thailand in its goal to become a capitalist country, opening the country for the FDI and exported goods to supply international markets which shared a similar economic ideology. Although China was a significant market for Thai exports, Thailand was able to ship its goods to other markets. Moreover, Thailand did not rely on economic support from China, especially if the support would lead to a conflict with the U.S., an unthinkable scenario given Thailand's reliance on U.S. military support, an alliance with which to confront the communists and valuable know-

how for industrialization. The obstacle to the Thai-China commercial relation also stemmed from the Chinese government. Due to the conflict between Chinese Communist Party leaders in the 1960s followed by the Cultural Revolution, it is possible that the government did not recognize the priority of economic cooperation with Thailand, both through the exchange of technologies and experts and encouragement of import-export trade. Additionally, in the mid-1960s, the Chinese government focused on providing aid for the African countries where they expected to expand Chinese influence and maintain their friendly relations (Adie, 1968).

Thai-China economic relations, however, recovered in the mid-1970s when the diplomatic relationship was normalized within the new phase of the China-U.S. rapprochement in the early years of this decade. The friendly Thai-China relations after July 1975, of course, contributed to the beginning of the import-export trade. Thailand shipped rice, teak and para rubber, the most important commodities, to China. These imports became necessary for China, especially when Deng Xiaoping introduced the Four Modernizations policy and the Open-Door policy to transform the Chinese economy. These policies led to China becoming a capitalist country which relied on primary sources from other countries while welcoming the FDI from other countries. The Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, embarked on a visit to Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore in November 1978 to normalize the China-Southeast Asia relations (Lee, 1981). Deng's policy did not only foster diplomatic relationships, but also served to open 'economic relations' with China's neighbouring countries. Thailand, on the other hand, relied on Sino-Thai capitalists who preferred to 'go back to their motherland' to resume the good relationship with China while grasping economic profit from the Chinese economic transformation until the present day.

5. Conclusions

The story of Thai-China economic relations in the second half of the twentieth century demonstrates the potential of the Bandung Conference to foster economic cooperation, one essential dimension of the Final Communiqué. During the peak of the Cold War Period in the 1950s and the 1960s, global politics was one of the major obstacles to encourage economic cooperation among the participating countries of the conference. The divergence of political ideologies contributed to a difficulty to

provide support to countries that relied on different political systems. In addition, the participating countries were new emerging countries after the decline of colonialism. This resulted in the low economic capability of these countries which were unable to support each other.

The economic cooperation expected at the Bandung Conference, nevertheless, came into existence as global politics changed. The rapprochement between the U.S. and China was a major factor contributing to the emergence of economic cooperations among the participating countries. As seen in Thai-China economic relations, the United States' shift towards China prompted the Thai government to resume trade with China and support foreign direct investment. This new chapter in Thai-China relations continued to develop as the two countries cooperated for their mutual interests without political interference.

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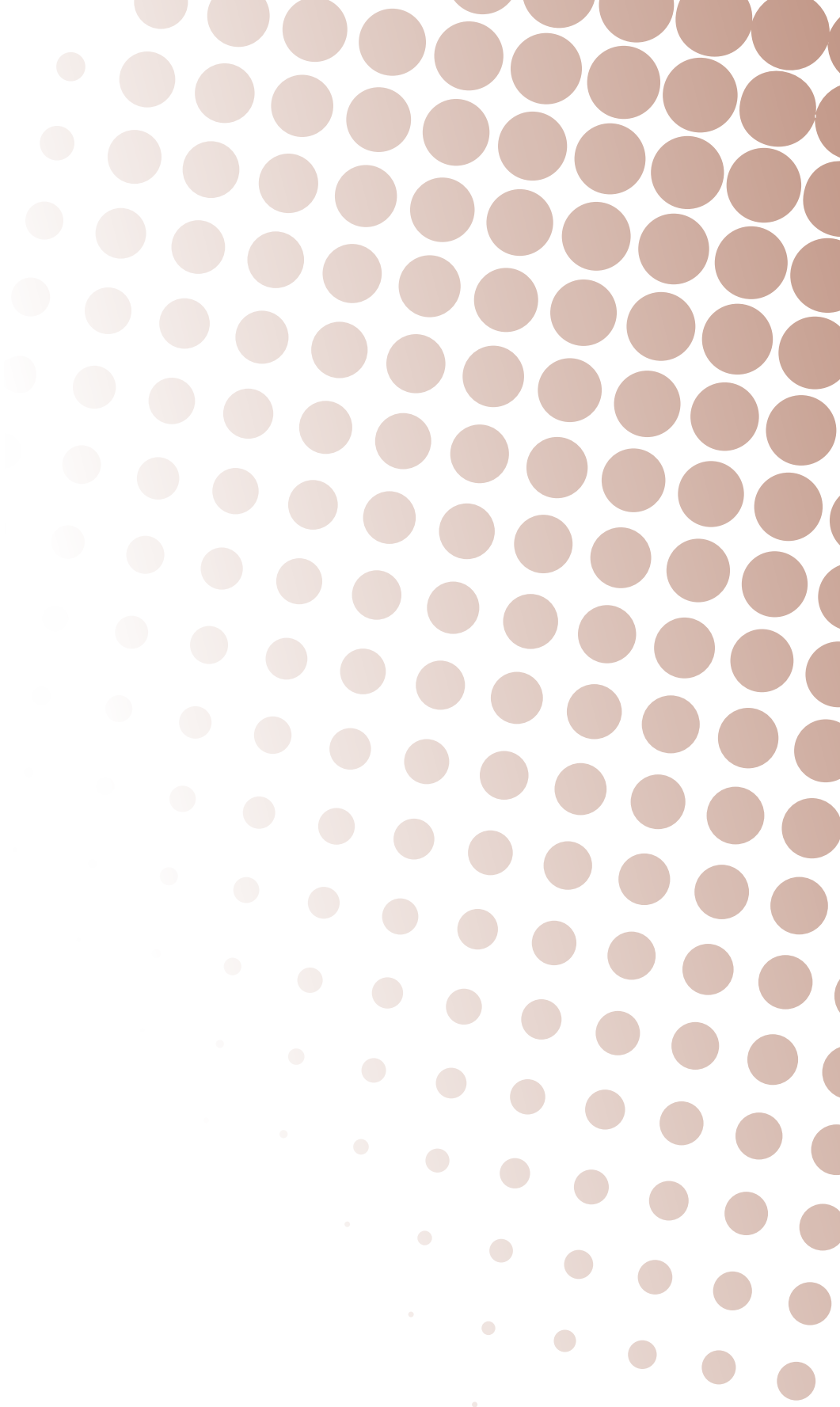
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CAMBODIA'S ROLE IN THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT

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Abstract

This paper explores Cambodia's historical and contemporary engagement with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), analysing its significance in the context of 21st-century geopolitical dynamics. We begin with an overview of Cambodia's motivations for joining NAM in 1961, rooted in its struggles against colonialism and the desire for sovereignty amid Cold War tensions. As a member state, Cambodia reaffirmed its commitment to non-alignment and peace, using the platform to advocate for development and cooperation among global South nations. The analysis then transitions to the role of the NAM in the emerging multipolar world, emphasizing its relevance in addressing pressing global challenges such as climate change, health disparities, and regional conflicts. Cambodia's foreign policy trajectory post-Cold War reveals its complex balancing act between Western engagement and increasing reliance on China – a pattern reflective of broader trends within NAM. Ultimately, this paper elucidates how Cambodia's participation in the NAM shapes its foreign policy and contributes to the movement's objectives of promoting self-determination, political solidarity, and sustainable development among its member states. Through this examination, we underscore Cambodia's role as a pivotal actor in reinforcing the NAM's mission while navigating the complexities of an evolving global landscape.

Keywords: *Non-Aligned Movement, Cambodia, South-South cooperation, Multipolar world order, foreign policy, economic strategy*

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1. Introduction

Cambodia, a Southeast Asian nation with a complex political history, has been an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) since its accession in 1961. The NAM was founded as a coalition of states seeking to assert their independence and sovereignty at a time characterized by the divisive influence of the Cold War. Founded in the late 1950s, NAM today has 120 member countries, all from the Global South. Although the NAM is the birthplace of a bipolar world, it has not lost its relevance in the 21st century, which is characterized by a multipolar world order, regional conflicts, the growing importance of developing countries and global challenges that transcend national borders. Cambodia's participation in the NAM reflects its quest for sovereignty, its post-colonial identity and its strategic positioning in a region influenced by larger powers such as the United States, China and Vietnam. Although the focus of attention on the Non-Aligned Movement tends to be on the major powers, the activities and achievements of the smaller countries are also of great importance to us, as the lessons learned are relevant to other nations.

This paper examines Cambodia's historical involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement, its relevance to the 21st century, then its foreign policy orientation and the implications of its role in contemporary international relations.

2. Historical Context of Cambodia's Membership in the NAM

The historical roots of the Southeast Asian country's membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is deeply intertwined with the country's political evolution, regional dynamics, and broader global events during the mid-20th century. Cambodia's pathway to joining NAM reflects its struggles against colonialism, militarism, and the overarching influences of superpowers during the Cold War era.

Cambodia was a French protectorate from 1863 until it achieved independence in 1953. During the colonial period, nationalist sentiments grew, and various movements emerged, demanding sovereignty and self-determination (Chandler, 2000). This colonial legacy profoundly influenced Cambodia's political landscape, instilling a desire for autonomy and a commitment to non-alignment.

Cambodian nationalism gained momentum in the early 20th century, particularly after World War II. The efforts of leaders like Norodom Sihanouk, who became king in 1941 and assumed a more politically active role in 1945, were crucial. Sihanouk sought to garner support for a sovereign Cambodia free from foreign domination, thereby laying the groundwork for the country's future foreign policy (Ross, 2015).

With the onset of the Cold War, Southeast Asia became a significant focal point for both the United States and the Soviet Union, each vying for influence in the region. Neighbouring countries like Vietnam and Laos were embroiled in conflicts that reflected the ideological divides of the era, and Cambodia sought to remain neutral amidst the rising tensions.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, recognizing the risks posed by potential alliances with either superpower, Sihanouk adopted a policy of neutrality. He believed that Cambodia could avoid the fate of its neighbours by cultivating relationships with a wide range of countries, demonstrating that a non-aligned stance could provide security against external influences (Osborne, 1994).

The Non-Aligned Movement was formally established in 1961 during the Belgrade Conference, attended by leaders from countries like India, Egypt, and Yugoslavia. The formation of NAM was a response to the pressures of the Cold War, as many nations sought to assert their independence and promote peace without being caught in the crossfire of superpower rivalry. The movement was based primarily on principles that emphasised respect for sovereignty, non-interference and peaceful coexistence.

Cambodia's desire to remain autonomous and its commitment to the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and non-interference in domestic affairs resonated with the core values of the NAM (Cambodia Magazine, 2024). Sihanouk's leadership and vision for a neutral Cambodia aligned well with the Movement's goals.

The Southeast Asian country officially became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. Its membership was significant not only as an endorsement of the principles of non-alignment but also as a statement of sovereignty against outside domination. This was a strategic decision that allowed Cambodia to assert its voice within a broader international forum, seeking support and solidarity from other developing nations (Lüthi, 2016).

As a NAM member, Cambodia participated actively in summits and discussions, often advocating for peace and development issues relevant to post-colonial states. Cambodia's involvement in the Movement was also an attempt to highlight its unique position within the context of Southeast Asia, focusing on regional cooperation and understanding.

Unfortunately, the political stability that Cambodia sought through its Non-Aligned membership was shattered by the Cambodian Civil War, which erupted in 1968. The Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, took control in 1975, leading to a catastrophic regime that disregarded international norms and was responsible for the deaths of up to 3 million of people. During this period, Cambodia's participation in the NAM was effectively ended, and the country became isolated on the global stage (Short, 2005).

After the downfall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, Cambodia underwent a process of rehabilitation and rebuilding. In 1978, the Vietnamese invasion overthrew Pol Pot's reign of terror, but the government of Heng Samrin, later Hun Sen, who replaced him, ran a more liberal, communist regime modelled on the Vietnamese. In the first half of the 1990s the transitional government sought to reestablish its international relations, including re-engagement with the NAM. Returning to the movement allowed Cambodia to advocate for its reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, and the promotion of peace and stability.

3. The NAM in the New Multipolar World

Since the end of the Cold War, the global balance of power has shifted considerably. The rise of emerging powers such as China, India, Brazil and others has led to a multipolar world in which the United States is gradually losing its former supremacy. This complex, often controversial process allows the NAM to remain a relevant platform that gives a voice to countries seeking to assert their interests in an increasingly competitive international environment (Global South) (Bhattacharya, 2024).

In multilateral negotiations, for example on trade, climate change or security issues, the NAM offers a collective negotiating position that can lend weight to the concerns of developing countries.

As many issues disproportionately affect developing countries, NAM acts as a unifying body that advocates for common goals: 1. A united voice on climate change:

NAM countries often bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change, despite contributing only minimally to the problem (Wuebbles, 2018). The movement can advocate for equitable climate policies that take into account the development needs of poorer nations. 2. The NAM can provide a platform to call for equitable distribution of vaccines and health resources and ensure that poorer nations receive the support they need (WHO, 2022).

At a time of growing geopolitical tensions, such as the conflicts in the Middle East, the South China Sea and elsewhere, the NAM's commitment to peaceful coexistence provides a necessary counterpoint to the rivalries of the great powers, as the movement advocates peaceful conflict resolution and calls for diplomatic solutions rather than military intervention (Kugari, 2024). This is particularly important in a multipolar world where power dynamics often lead to confrontational behaviour. The organization can serve as a mediator in regional conflicts where major powers pursue different interests. By presenting itself as a neutral platform, the movement can facilitate dialog and promote peacemaking initiatives between conflicting nations.

The movement can unite member states to advocate for disarmament treaties and arms control that prevent escalation between major powers (Kostic, 2021). The diversity of NAM members, encompassing different cultures, religions and political systems, allows for a rich dialog that promotes cultural exchange. This cultural diplomacy promotes understanding and can counter extremism and xenophobia. Last but not least, the NAM promotes exchange programs, scholarships and initiatives that enable young people from different member states to learn from each other.

The NAM undoubtedly serves as a platform to promote the principles of sovereignty, self-determination and non-interference. Political solidarity between Member States can strengthen their collective voice in international forums and ensure that they address issues that are important to them. In this sense, the NAM can work together for reforms in institutions such as the United Nations, where smaller nations often struggle to make their voices heard.

4. Cambodia's Main Issues in NAM Engagement

Cambodia's engagement in the Non-Aligned Movement reflects its historical experience, its pursuit of peace and development, and its commitment to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Through its advocacy for peace, economic development, social justice and addressing global challenges, Cambodia uses its platform within the NAM to influence international discourse and policy that aligns with its national interests and the collective aspirations of developing countries (Chanborey, 2018).

By asserting these key themes in its engagement with the NAM, Cambodia not only seeks to strengthen its own position on the international stage, but also contributes to the movement's overarching goals of promoting cooperation, mutual respect and sustainable development. In this way, Cambodia aims to manage the complexities of a rapidly evolving global landscape while upholding the ideals of the Non-Aligned Movement and championing the rights and priorities of developing countries (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2025).

5. Cambodia's Foreign Policy Orientation after the Cold War

After 1991, Cambodia committed itself to a multipolar foreign policy that prioritized equal distance from the great powers, regional integration and close cooperation with neighbouring states.

As Western support was essential for the country's economic development in the 1990s, the government seemed to accept the criteria of a democratic political establishment in return for aid. As the regime change in Cambodia represented a great economic opportunity for European countries and especially for the U.S., Western governments sought to cooperate with Hun Sen's cabinet, which remained in power after the regime change and even tolerated its autocratic tendencies to a certain extent (Strangio, 2014).

However, at the beginning of the 21st century, in addition to fruitful cooperation with the ASEAN countries, China has increasingly gained influence in the region despite the help of the EU, the U.S. and Japan. Hun Sen welcomed the economic takeover by China as Beijing did not criticize the system and, unlike the West, did not impose

conditions for investment, aid or loans (Mehta & Mehta, 1999). By the mid-2010s, China had become Cambodia's largest trading partner, the largest foreign investor in the country, the largest donor of aid money and the most important partner and supporter of the Khmer Rouge army (Cheunboran, 2015).

China's growing influence has also become visible in the political arena. Cambodia's willingness to openly support China over other ASEAN member states in some cases is more indicative of the country's changing foreign policy stance and the shifting international balance of power than anything else (Hunt, 2012). Cambodia's relationship with China is best understood as a combination of strategic calculation and necessity, aimed at securing economic development and national defence in a region where the country's security and sovereignty is under constant pressure from more powerful neighbours and where available strategic options are limited (Lim, 2024)

Hun Sen had already stated in 2017 that the main objective was to secure his power and that he could crack down on his opposition to this end and that possible Western sanctions and a deterioration in relations would be offset by political and economic support from China and Russia as well as other rising powers. After Hun Sen handed over the office of prime minister to his son Hun Manet in 2023, the regime has not changed significantly and cooperation with emerging powers continues to dominate foreign policy.

6. Contemporary Engagement and Strategic Importance

Cambodia's current involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is an important aspect of its foreign policy, particularly in view of its position in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape in the 21st century. As a member of the NAM, Cambodia is committed to asserting its sovereignty, advocating for the rights of developing countries and contributing to global discussions on key issues such as peace, security, economic development and climate change.

The country's foreign policy places great emphasis on sovereignty, a principle that is also fundamental to the NAM. The country's history of foreign intervention, particularly during the Khmer Rouge era and subsequent conflicts, underscores the need for a protective stance that prioritizes independence from outside influence.

In the present day, Cambodia seeks to balance its relations with global powers such as China and the United States. While China plays an important role as an economic partner, Cambodia seeks to commit to non-alignment and advocates a diplomatic approach that resists overt alignment with a superpower (Cambodiansess, 2022). In terms of pragmatism, the U.S. is also interested in cooperation, especially during Donald Trump's presidency.

Through its participation in both ASEAN and NAM, Cambodia aims to promote regional autonomy. This dual engagement helps to maintain a united Southeast Asian front while reaffirming the importance of collective Southeast Asian interests in global affairs (Bunthorn, 2022).

Cambodia actively uses the NAM platform to advocate for the economic development of member states. The country focuses on promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and emphasizes the need to achieve economic growth that is both inclusive and sustainable (Open Development Cambodia, 2021). Cambodia also actively supports initiatives aimed at helping vulnerable economies under the NAM. This advocacy includes calls for debt relief, trade facilitation and technical assistance, with a focus on equitable global economic systems.

Cambodia has actively advocated for fair trade practices among NAM members. It is committed to trade policies that ensure equitable access to markets for developing countries and aim to eliminate the inequalities that often disadvantage less developed countries.

Another important goal of the NAM is to attract foreign investment that is in line with sustainable business practices. It emphasizes the importance of investments that benefit local communities and promote long-term development rather than short-term gains.

The Southeast Asian country seeks to position itself as a mediator in regional conflicts and advocates for peaceful solutions (Press Xpress, 2025). This role enhances its credibility within the NAM and is in line with its historical commitment to peace, especially after the devastating effects of internal conflicts. It also emphasizes the importance of regional security dialogs that involve NAM members and facilitate discussions on terrorism, transnational crime and humanitarian assistance.

Cambodia advocates a broad definition of security that encompasses not only military security but also human security. This approach encompasses social, economic and environmental dimensions and reflects a holistic understanding of security issues faced by developing countries (Hunt, 2018).

Given its vulnerability to climate change, Cambodia is using its NAM engagement to advocate for stronger climate action. The country is calling for more support and technology transfer from developed countries to developing countries to increase resilience to climate change.

The government of Cambodia emphasizes the integration of sustainable agricultural and environmental practices into development strategies and highlights the importance of protecting natural resources for future generations.

As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia has emphasized the need for a collective approach to address global public health challenges. As part of the NAM, Cambodia is advocating for equitable access to vaccines and health resources.

Cambodia calls for international cooperation in strengthening health systems, especially in developing countries facing major health challenges. Its commitment underscores the need to build a robust health infrastructure and ensure basic services for marginalized populations (Pheakdey et al., 2020).

It is clear that Cambodia is using its NAM membership to promote cultural exchange and understanding between member countries. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to improve people-to-people relations and promote mutual respect for different cultures. It means championing educational initiatives that improve cooperation between member states and creating a framework for knowledge exchange that increases capacity in different areas.

By promoting tourism within the framework of the NAM, Cambodia is trying to improve economic opportunities and cultural exchange between the member countries. The country views tourism as an important avenue for economic growth, cultural understanding and the promotion of closer relations between nations (Dahles, 2023).

The question arises: What strategic role does Cambodia really play in the NAM? Cambodia's active participation in the NAM positions the country as the voice of Southeast Asian nations on the global stage. By leveraging its experience and advoca-

ting for issues that are relevant to regional dynamics, Cambodia is strengthening its status as a leader in both ASEAN and the NAM.

In the face of ongoing tensions in Southeast Asia – particularly in the South China Sea – Cambodia's non-alignment stance and commitment to dialog contribute to regional stability. This contribution is crucial at a time when regional disputes could escalate into major conflicts.

Cambodia's role in the NAM also includes the promotion of South-South cooperation between developing countries (Al-Khatib, 2024). By sharing experiences, best practices and resources, Cambodia facilitates cooperative initiatives that emphasize mutual benefit and collective growth.

Within the NAM, Cambodia emphasizes the importance of collective action in addressing the challenges faced by developing countries, reaffirming its commitment to the movement's core principles and objectives.

Through its active participation in the NAM, Cambodia not only seeks to advance its national interests, but also contributes to the broader goals of the movement and emphasizes the importance of non-alignment in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape.

Through these efforts, Phnom Penh can be seen as a strategic player within the NAM, advocating for a more just and equitable international order that reflects the aspirations of developing countries around the world.

7. Economic Strategies within the Non-Aligned Movement

Cambodia's economic strategies within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) are reflective of its broader objectives to promote sustainable development, create equitable trade practices, and ensure the economic prosperity of its citizens while navigating the complexities of global economic dynamics.

As we have seen Cambodia actively aligns its national economic policies with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Its strategies emphasize sustainable economic growth, poverty alleviation, and social equity, recognizing the need for

development that benefits all citizens while preserving natural resources (Open Development Cambodia, 2018).

The Cambodian government promotes environmentally sustainable practices in agriculture, industry, and urban development, seeking to balance economic growth with ecological preservation. This approach includes initiatives aimed at reforestation, sustainable farming, and the responsible use of water resources.

Within NAM, Cambodia seeks support for sustainable development initiatives, leveraging the collective strength of member states to secure international funding, technology transfer, and best practices in areas such as renewable energy and sustainable agriculture.

Cambodia advocates for the establishment of fair-trade agreements that benefit developing countries. It emphasizes the need for trade policies that do not disadvantage smaller economies against larger, more powerful trading partners, thereby promoting a more balanced economic environment.

Recognizing the critical role of SMEs in driving economic growth, Cambodia promotes policies that support these businesses through better access to markets and financial resources (Sorn & Fu, 2023). This support extends to creating a conducive environment for entrepreneurship that empowers local communities.

By leveraging its membership in NAM, Cambodia seeks to enhance its negotiating power at international forums. The country pushes for discussions that recognize the rights and interests of developing nations in global trade systems, striving for an equitable balance between developed and developing countries.

Creating an attractive investment climate is an important ambition of Phnom Penh. The government has implemented policies aimed at creating a favorable environment for foreign direct investment (FDI) (Phnom Penh Now, 2024). This includes simplifying regulatory processes, offering tax incentives, and building infrastructure that supports investors.

The government identifies key sectors – such as agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing – where it aims to attract investment. These sectors align with national development goals and can drive economic growth while benefiting local communities.

The harmonious partnership with other NAM members has gained momentum as well. Cambodia encourages collaboration with other developing countries within

NAM to facilitate knowledge sharing and investment opportunities. By fostering South-South cooperation, Cambodia seeks to diversify its sources of investment and avoid over-reliance on any single country.

No doubt a member of both ASEAN and NAM, the country plays an active role in promoting regional economic integration through initiatives like the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). This framework aims to create a single market and production base in the region, enhancing competitiveness and economic growth (Charadine, 2020).

By supporting initiatives that facilitate cross-border trade with its neighbours, emphasizing the importance of trade agreements would expand market access for Cambodian goods and services.

Cambodia seeks to secure investments in infrastructure development that will support both domestic growth and regional connectivity. Improved transportation and communication networks are essential for enhancing trade and attracting foreign investment (ADB, 2008).

Within the NAM and ASEAN frameworks, Cambodia advocates for collaborative infrastructure projects that benefit multiple countries, fostering economic ties and enhancing regional stability.

Regarding the engagement in international financial institutions we can say that Cambodia engages with multilateral development banks, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), to secure funding for development projects (ADB, n. d.). Within the NAM framework, the country emphasizes the need for international financial support that is accessible and tailored to the needs of developing nations.

In parallel it advocates for debt relief programs for developing countries recognizing that high debt levels can hinder economic growth and development efforts. This advocacy is aimed at creating a more sustainable financial environment for vulnerable economies.

Recognizing that human capital is crucial for sustainable economic growth, Cambodia focuses on improving education and skills training. This includes implementing programs that enhance technical skills and vocational training to meet the needs of the labour market (Education in Cambodia, 2024).

At the same time Cambodia promotes educational exchange programs within the NAM framework to share knowledge and best practices among member states. Strengthening educational ties increases the capacity of its labor force and creates opportunities for cultural exchange and cooperation. Meanwhile technical assistance from other NAM countries, leveraging their experiences in education and workforce development can improve the country's own systems.

While Cambodia emphasizes its non-aligned stance, it recognizes the importance of building strategic partnerships both within the NAM and beyond. This includes cultivating relationships with emerging economies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to broaden economic ties (Chheang, 2021).

The Southeast Asian country encourages partnerships between governments and the private sector to drive economic development. By fostering a conducive environment for public-private collaboration, the aim is to leverage investments for infrastructure and other critical sectors.

As a small country, Cambodia is not immune to global economic influences (Cambodia Development Resource Institute, 2013). That is why its economic strategies within NAM include developing resilience against global economic shocks, such as those caused by financial crises or pandemics (e.g., COVID-19). Developing contingency plans and diversifying the economy can help mitigate the impacts of global economic fluctuations.

By sharing knowledge and resources, Cambodia can enhance its preparedness for emergencies and economic disruptions, making it more capable of navigating complex global challenges.

The country's strategies prioritize inclusive economic policies that support marginalized groups, such as women and rural communities. By championing social policies that address inequality, the country seeks to ensure that economic growth benefits all citizens rather than a select few. The link between economic strategies and social welfare is emphasized, with Cambodia promoting policies that integrate economic development with social equity.

We can conclude that the above-mentioned strategies not only aim to enhance Cambodia's economic growth and stability but also to contribute to the collective aspirations of NAM member states for a more just and equitable global economic system.

Through collaboration with other developing countries, active participation in discussions on global economic policies, and a strong commitment to sustainability and social equity, Cambodia is forging a path that reflects its unique context and hopes for a prosperous future within the broader framework of the Non-Aligned Movement.

8. Challenges Faced by Cambodia in NAM

Cambodia's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) presents numerous opportunities, but also challenges. These challenges arise from domestic political dynamics, geopolitical pressures in the region, economic vulnerabilities and the complexity of collective decision-making within the NAM.

Cambodia maintains a close partnership with China, which plays a crucial role in the country's economic development through extensive investment and aid. However, this relationship raises concerns about Cambodia's ability to maintain its non-aligned stance without appearing to favour China over other NAM members, particularly those within ASEAN (Hindoian, 2024).

While the United States is trying to counterbalance China's influence in the region, Cambodia is also facing pressure from Washington to align its policies more closely with American interests. This geopolitical tug-of-war complicates Cambodia's efforts to manage its foreign relations without jeopardizing its sovereign position (Po & Primiano, 2024).

As a member of both NAM and ASEAN, Cambodia must manage its obligations and relationships within these organizations. Regional conflicts and differing priorities among ASEAN members complicate Cambodia's ability to position itself effectively within the broader regional framework.

In terms of domestic challenges, we must recognize that the country faces significant problems related to governance, corruption and political repression. Human rights organizations have raised concerns about the Cambodian government's practices, which may undermine the country's credibility within the NAM and draw criticism from other member states (Hassan, 2024).

A political environment that restricts civil society can limit the government's ability to constructively engage in NAM initiatives that focus on equality, justice and human

rights. A vibrant civil society is essential to hold governments accountable and ensure participation in global dialogs.

Views on Cambodia's involvement in the NAM can vary. Some citizens doubt the effectiveness of the NAM in promoting meaningful change or combating perceived external influences. This scepticism can challenge the government's efforts to build a unified national identity around non-aligned status.

Among the challenges, of course, is economic vulnerability. Cambodia's heavy reliance on foreign investment and aid, particularly from China, makes the country vulnerable to economic fluctuations and geopolitical tensions (Mit, 2024). Should China withdraw its support or impose conditions, this could have a significant negative impact on the Cambodian economy and affect the country's development prospects.

Cambodia must navigate complex global trading systems while advocating for fair conditions for its exports. The challenge is to find a balance between the need for foreign investment and the desire to promote domestic industry and reduce dependency.

Despite economic growth, Cambodia faces significant income disparities and regional development disparities. Efforts to promote inclusion and equity can be hindered by economic structures that favour certain groups. This can lead to social unrest and dissatisfaction, which could affect participation in the NAM.

Collective decision-making can also be a source of serious problems for the NAM. As the organization encompasses a wide range of countries with different political, economic and cultural contexts, it can be difficult to reach consensus on policy issues. Cambodia often has to navigate this diversity and balance its national interests with those of other member states.

While the NAM aims to provide a collective voice for the Global South, Cambodia – like many smaller member states – may struggle to exert significant influence in global governance discussions, especially vis-à-vis larger, more powerful nations.

When it comes to the environment and climate change, the situation is not easy, as Cambodia is one of the countries most affected by climate change, experiencing problems such as floods and droughts that threaten agricultural productivity and economic stability (World Bank Group, 2023). Although the NAM provides a platform to advocating for climate action, Cambodia faces the challenge of translating international commitments into effective local solutions. To effectively address its

climate challenges, Cambodia needs technical and financial support from developed countries. This need may complicate the country's position in the NAM, where issues of equity and historical responsibility for global warming are important.

The integration of NAM goals into national policies is also a complex issue. The challenge is to effectively implement the organization's overall goals within the national policy framework. Cambodia needs to ensure that its national policies are not only consistent with NAM principles, but also meet local needs and priorities.

Limited resources may prevent Cambodia from fully engaging in NAM initiatives, implement new strategies or fulfilling commitments made at NAM summits. Prioritizing resource allocation is critical to maximizing the benefits of engagement.

To summarize, I believe that Cambodia's engagement with the Non-Aligned Movement is a crucial component of its foreign policy and development strategies. However, the interrelated challenges facing the country require a nuanced approach that balances national needs with international obligations. By effectively addressing these challenges, Cambodia can strengthen its role in the NAM, harness the collective strength of its members and advance its interests in a complex and changing global landscape. The way forward requires adaptable strategies, strategic diplomacy and an unwavering commitment to the principles that underpin the Non-Aligned Movement.

9. Conclusions

Cambodia has been a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) since 1961, reflecting its commitment to independence from major power blocs and the pursuit of national interests. The country's role in the Non-Aligned Movement is multifaceted, reflecting its historical experiences, aspirations for peace and prosperity, and a commitment to advocating for the needs of developing nations. As both a founding member and an active participant, Cambodia has leveraged the principles of the NAM to assert its sovereignty, promote regional cooperation, and emphasize economic equity.

In the context of the 21st century, Cambodia's engagement in the NAM is characterized by a focus on sustainable development, advocacy for public health, and the protection of sovereignty amidst geopolitical pressures. However, the nation must continually navigate challenges related to balancing relationships with major global

powers, addressing domestic political issues, and maintaining its relevance in a shifting global landscape.

By reaffirming its commitment to the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement and harnessing its collective strength, Cambodia can play a significant role in shaping an international order that prioritizes dialogue, cooperation, and the aspirations of developing nations. Through its involvement in NAM, Cambodia not only asserts its voice in global discussions but also advances its foreign policy objectives and supports regional stability and economic growth. This engagement is essential not only for Southeast Asian country's own development but also for contributing to the broader goals of the NAM in achieving a more just and equitable world.

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FROM BANDUNG TO THE ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY: MEASURING THE DEVELOPMENTAL EFFECTS OF SOUTH–SOUTH COOPERATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract

This article revisits the legacy of the 1955 Bandung Conference through the lens of ASEAN's evolving model of South–South Cooperation (SSC). It examines whether ASEAN's horizontal, sovereignty-respecting cooperation frameworks—embodied in the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), and Indonesia's South–South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)—have contributed measurably to regional economic integration between 2015 and 2024. Using a mixed-methods design combining institutional data with ASEAN macroeconomic indicators, the study constructs a South–South Cooperation Intensity Index (SSI) and tests its relationship with intra-ASEAN trade, investment, and GDP convergence. The findings reveal strong positive associations: SSC intensity correlates with higher intra-regional trade and FDI shares, and declining income disparities among member states. These results suggest that Bandung's principles of equality, mutual benefit, and non-conditionality continue to inform ASEAN's development model, transforming solidarity from a normative ideal into a quantifiable mechanism of integration. Marking the 70th anniversary of

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the 1955 Bandung Conference in 2025, the study highlights ASEAN’s experience as an empirically verifiable embodiment of Bandung’s enduring developmental logic.

Keywords: *Bandung Spirit, South–South Cooperation, ASEAN Economic Community, regional integration, development Economics.*

1. Introduction

South–South Cooperation (SSC) occupies an increasingly prominent place within the evolving architecture of global development. As traditional aid paradigms face growing criticism for perpetuating dependency, SSC offers an alternative grounded in the principles historically associated with the 1955 Bandung Conference—sovereignty, mutual benefit, equality, and non-conditionality (Acharya, 2016b; Prashad, 2007). Seventy years later, SSC has become institutionalised across multilateral development systems, yet its philosophical foundation remains traceable to Bandung’s normative architecture.

The normative underpinnings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) resonate particularly strongly with Bandung’s ethos. The ASEAN Charter (2007) codifies many of these values, influencing both internal cooperation and external partnerships. Regional-level SSC mechanisms such as the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) and the ASEAN Development Fund (ADF) are designed to address development disparities, especially among the CLMV countries—Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam. These frameworks operate within ASEAN’s collective institutional setting and are co-financed by member states, whose national programmes include Malaysia’s Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), Thailand’s Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), and Indonesia’s South–South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). Their implementation reflects a shared commitment to equitable development and capacity building, pursued without external conditionalities.

Within this institutional context, ASEAN’s broader commitment to economic integration—articulated in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2025—raises a critical empirical question: Does South–South Cooperation, inspired by Bandung’s principles, contribute in measurable ways to ASEAN’s regional integration? This study addresses that question by analysing the period 2015–2024, when

SSC reporting became increasingly systematised and data on integration indicators reached their most comprehensive form. Methodologically, the article constructs a composite SSC Intensity Index (SSI) based on training participation, budget allocation, and partner diversity across key ASEAN SSC agencies. These data are compared with macroeconomic indicators of integration—trade, investment, and GDP convergence—drawn from ASEANstats, UNCTAD, and World Bank databases. The analysis employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative correlation and qualitative institutional interpretation.

By situating SSC within the framework of Bandung’s developmental philosophy, this article contributes to both theoretical and policy debates on regional cooperation. It argues that ASEAN’s experience exemplifies the transformation of solidarity into an operational mechanism of regional development. In doing so, it demonstrates that the Bandung Spirit—seventy years on—remains not a relic of anti-colonial history but a measurable, evolving force shaping contemporary international political economy.

2. Theoretical Framing

The 1955 Asian–African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia marked a watershed in the evolution of global development cooperation. Emerging from the early post-colonial period, it articulated a set of principles—sovereignty, equality, mutual benefit, non-interference, and solidarity—that challenged the asymmetrical donor–recipient logic of North–South aid. The “Bandung Spirit” was less a political slogan than a developmental philosophy that sought to institutionalize cooperation among newly independent states on the basis of partnership rather than hierarchy (Assie-Lumumba, 2015).

Over the past decade, South–South Cooperation (SSC) has evolved from a peripheral discourse into a structured and measurable element of international development cooperation. This institutionalization has been reinforced by efforts to standardize monitoring and evaluation. According to the United Nations Office for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC, 2023), SSC refers to the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge among developing countries to advance sustainable development through solidarity and equality. The definition emphasises both process and purpose: cooperation among peers, motivated by reciprocal benefit and grounded in the principle of sovereign agency. UNCTAD’s *Manual for the Framework to Measure South–South Cooperation* (2025) even provides indicators for assessing financial

contributions, training activities, and knowledge transfers, while SDG target 17.3.1 situates SSC within the global framework for mobilizing additional development finance. The emergence of organisations such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) further underscores SSC’s movement toward formalisation. These institutions—together with national cooperation agencies—operate largely through demand-driven, project-based modalities that prioritise infrastructure, digital connectivity, and technical assistance. Their proliferation suggests that SSC has become a complementary pillar of the global development architecture rather than a rhetorical alternative to it.

In this wider context, Bandung’s legacy remains visible not as nostalgia but as institutional logic. It offers a framework for understanding SSC as a practice of post-colonial agency, particularly in regions like Southeast Asia, where states balance developmental autonomy with economic interdependence. The redefinition of SSC since the 1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action illustrates a shift from moral solidarity to structured cooperation—without abandoning Bandung’s emancipatory intent. In economic terms, the Bandung ethos anticipated a horizontal form of integration in which progress stems from mutual learning and capacity sharing rather than conditional transfers.

2.1. ASEAN and the Regionalisation of Bandung

Few regions have translated these principles into institutional form as explicitly as Southeast Asia. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), established in 1967, embodies a governance philosophy closely aligned with Bandung’s cooperative logic. The “ASEAN Way”—consensus-based decision-making, non-interference in domestic affairs, and mutual respect—has frequently been described as a political manifestation of Bandung’s ideals (Acharya, 2016a; Fennell, 2022; Szakáli, 2023). While the original Bandung participants envisaged Afro-Asian solidarity, ASEAN localised the same principles within a regional organisation that combined political non-alignment with pragmatic economic cooperation.

Within this architecture, SSC has become both a development tool and an instrument of regional integration. Malaysia’s MTCP, Indonesia’s SSTC, and Thailand’s TICA exemplify Bandung’s notion of horizontal partnership. These national agencies coordinate technical training, policy exchanges, and institutional support among ASEAN Member States (AMS) and other developing partners. At the regional level,

the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) and the ASEAN Development Fund (ADF) serve to narrow development gaps, particularly between the newer CLMV members—Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Viet Nam—and the older, more industrialised members. Cooperation under these frameworks is premised on mutual capacity-building rather than financial dependency, reflecting the Bandung principle of equality in partnership. *Table 1* summarises the principal national and regional mechanisms through which SSC is operationalised in Southeast Asia.

Table 1. SSC-related official cooperation in Southeast Asia (2015–2025)

Country	SSC Agency / Mechanism	Selected Projects / Activities	Remarks / Notes
Malaysia	Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP) (est. 1980)	Over 29,000 participants trained from 140 countries (by 2015) (SME Corp Malaysia)	Long-running programme; technical training and capacity-building focus
Indonesia	Indonesian South–South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)	Mapping of SSTC Resource Centres; reverse-linkage programmes (Islamic Development Bank data)	Active in technical cooperation and knowledge exchange
Thailand	Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA)	SSC and triangular cooperation training courses offered to CLMV and other developing countries	Institutional mechanism for training and cooperation
Regional	ASEAN intra-regional SSC frameworks (IAI, ADF, others)	Multiple intra-ASEAN SSC initiatives documented in <i>Mapping South–South Cooperation in ASEAN</i> (2018)	Evidence of regional institutionalization

Note: Entries refer to dedicated national agencies or government-led frameworks that implement South–South or triangular cooperation programmes. Among ASEAN Member States, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand maintain fully institutionalized SSC agencies. The regional entry represents ASEAN-level frameworks (IAI, ADF) coordinated by the ASEAN Secretariat.

Source: Compiled from SME Corp Malaysia (n.d.), IDFR (2015), Islamic Development Bank (2021), JICA (n.d.), Thailand MFA (2018), UNOSSC (2018), OECD (2022) and Asia Foundation (2018).

This horizontal model contrasts with the more centralised, conditional approaches characteristic of many multilateral development frameworks. It prioritises peer learning and shared institutional design over externally imposed policy standards. By

fostering equal participation, it creates the conditions for gradual institutional convergence—an important foundation for economic integration within the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The AEC Blueprint 2025, which seeks to achieve a “highly integrated and cohesive economy,” implicitly depends on the narrowing of development disparities and the strengthening of national capacities—objectives directly served by SSC mechanisms (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021).

2.2. ASEAN’s SSC in comparative perspective

The institutional character of ASEAN’s cooperation can be better understood when juxtaposed with global SSC frameworks (*Table 2*). Whereas global SSC mechanisms—such as UNOSSC platforms or the AIIB—tend to operate through bureaucratic multilateral channels aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, ASEAN’s model is decentralised and consensus-driven. The latter draws normative legitimacy from the Bandung principles codified in the ASEAN Charter (2007) and practical authority from member-state ownership.

Table 2. Key features of global vs. ASEAN SSC frameworks

Feature	Global SSC (UNOSSC, AIIB, etc.)	ASEAN SSC
Normative basis	SDG-aligned, UN resolutions	Bandung principles, ASEAN Charter
Implementation	Via UN agencies, triangular modalities	Member-led, consensus-driven
Financing sources	Multilateral and bilateral contributions	ASEAN Development Fund, national budgets
Thematic scope	Global issues (climate, health, technology)	Regional integration, capacity gaps
Governance style	Bureaucratic, policy-coordinated	Decentralised, informal coordination
Role of external actors	Often central to triangular cooperation	Supplementary role only

Source: Asia Foundation, 2018; UNOSSC, 2019.

This comparison underscores that ASEAN’s SSC framework is not a peripheral variant but a regionally embedded model of South–South cooperation. It reflects a distinct development philosophy: sovereignty-respecting, non-conditional, and oriented

toward mutual learning. The combination of Bandung's normative heritage with ASEAN's institutional pragmatism has produced a cooperative order that favours gradual integration through capability enhancement rather than through supranational authority.

2.3. From normative philosophy to measurable outcomes: the mechanism linking SSC and integration

Transforming the Bandung Spirit into an empirical research framework requires identifying how horizontal cooperation manifests in quantifiable outcomes. In this study, SSC intensity is understood as a measurable expression of Bandung's cooperative ethos, while economic integration indicators capture its material effects within ASEAN. Two empirical dimensions are central.

First, SSC-intensity variables represent national-level commitments to horizontal cooperation. These include the annual number of training courses and participants under MTCP, TICA, and SSTC, the corresponding budget allocations reported by national agencies, and the breadth of ASEAN or CLMV partner participation. Data from the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021), Indonesia's Bappenas (2020), and Thailand's TICA (2022), complemented by OECD (2022) country profiles, provide partial time-series evidence for 2015–2024. Though incomplete, these figures capture the scale and direction of peer-to-peer assistance—Bandung's principle operationalized as institutional exchange.

Second, regional integration indicators measure the outcomes that SSC might influence. Drawing on ASEANstats (2024) and World Bank datasets, these include the share of intra-ASEAN trade in total trade, the proportion of intra-ASEAN foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, and GDP per capita convergence among AMS. A reduction in the dispersion of GDP per capita and an increasing share of intra-regional trade and FDI would suggest that horizontal cooperation contributes to more balanced regional development. Additional proxies—such as human-capital improvements or increased participation of CLMV states in regional production networks—can further illustrate the diffusion of capabilities consistent with SSC principles.

The theoretical mechanism connecting Bandung-style cooperation to regional integration operates through four interrelated processes. Capability transmission occurs as governments share administrative and technical expertise through SSC programmes,

enabling weaker states to upgrade policy capacity. Institutional convergence follows as similar regulatory and administrative practices diffuse, lowering transaction costs and facilitating trade and investment. Reduction of developmental asymmetries arises when targeted SSC efforts help CLMV countries catch up with ASEAN's more advanced economies, fostering inclusivity within the AEC. Finally, expansion of intra-regional exchange results from the combined effects of improved capacities and aligned institutions, which increase intra-ASEAN flows of goods, services, and capital. Each stage can be examined empirically through the data outlined above.

This sequence gives analytical substance to Bandung's normative proposition: equality and solidarity are not abstract ideals but mechanisms that generate measurable developmental convergence. In economic terms, SSC becomes a transmission channel between cooperative norms and integration outcomes. The expectation, therefore, is that years or sectors characterised by greater SSC intensity correspond with stronger indicators of regional integration.

2.3.1. Analytical propositions and scope

From this reasoning arise two guiding propositions. First, higher SSC intensity—reflected in training budgets, participant numbers, or partner diversity—is associated with stronger integration performance, observable in increased intra-ASEAN trade and FDI shares. Second, SSC directed towards CLMV members exerts a disproportionate influence on overall regional convergence, accelerating the equalisation of GDP per capita across ASEAN. These propositions enable a quantitative exploration of Bandung's legacy in contemporary Southeast Asia.

The theoretical framing also recognises limitations. Data on SSC budgets and participants remain uneven and sometimes lack partner-country disaggregation (OECD, 2022). Causality between SSC and integration outcomes cannot be established unequivocally, since global economic trends or domestic reforms may intervene. Nonetheless, positioning SSC within a Bandung framework provides a coherent analytical bridge between the historical ideals of solidarity and the measurable processes of economic regionalisation. By interpreting integration through the lens of horizontal cooperation, this study transforms the Bandung Spirit from an historical declaration into a testable model of twenty-first-century regional development.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research design and epistemological orientation

This study employs a mixed-methods, data-driven design anchored in a realist epistemology and a regional political-economy approach. It assumes that the institutionalization of South–South Cooperation within ASEAN produces observable, measurable effects on regional integration outcomes. The empirical goal is therefore explanatory rather than purely descriptive: to assess whether, and to what extent, SSC intensity—as an expression of the Bandung Spirit—correlates with changes in ASEAN’s economic integration between 2015 and 2024.

The research adopts a comparative longitudinal strategy, combining:

1. Quantitative analysis of regional macro-integration indicators (trade, investment, and development convergence); and
2. Institutional and programme-level data on SSC activities in three ASEAN member states (Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand).

The period 2015–2024 is selected because it corresponds both to the implementation timeframe of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2025 and to the most complete decade of available SSC reporting across national agencies and ASEAN databases. Moreover, this temporal scope concludes just before the 70th anniversary of the 1955 Bandung Conference, commemorated in 2025 — a symbolic milestone that provides historical closure and analytical resonance. Examining SSC and ASEAN integration in the decade preceding this anniversary allows the study to assess the contemporary relevance of the Bandung Spirit within an institutionalized, regional context. The unit of analysis is the ASEAN region, with supporting national observations drawn from the main SSC agencies.

3.2. Conceptual model and operational variables

The research design translates the theoretical mechanism outlined in Chapter 2 into a set of operational variables. The conceptual logic assumes that Bandung-style SSC intensity enhances regional integration performance through capacity diffusion and convergence effects.

3.2.1. Independent variable: SSC intensity

SSC intensity represents the magnitude and breadth of South–South cooperation activities within ASEAN. It is operationalised through three measurable proxies, aggregated annually:

- Training participants (number per year) — total officials trained under national SSC programmes (MTCP, TICA, SSTC).
- Budget allocations (USD million) — reported annual funding of SSC/technical-cooperation activities.
- Partner diversity (count of ASEAN/CLMV partners) — number of distinct ASEAN partners engaged in national SSC projects.

Because data reporting practices vary, the study uses publicly available annual reports and official documents:

- *Malaysia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MTCP Annual Reports 2015–2024)*,
- *Indonesia Bappenas (SSTC Framework and updates 2015–2024)*,
- *Thailand International Cooperation Agency Annual Reports 2015–2024*,
- supplemented by *OECD (2022)* and *Asia Foundation (2018)* profiles for cross-validation.

Values are normalised across countries (z-scores) and combined into an SSC Intensity Index (SSI) using equal weighting to allow comparison across years.

3.2.2. Dependent variables: Regional integration outcomes

Three dependent variables capture ASEAN's progress in economic integration and developmental convergence, drawn from ASEANstats Data Portal (2024), World Bank World Development Indicators, and UNCTAD FDI Statistics:

- Intra-ASEAN trade share (% of total ASEAN trade).
- Intra-ASEAN FDI inflows (% of total FDI into ASEAN).
- GDP-per-capita convergence, measured as the coefficient of variation (CV) of GDP per capita across AMS, where a declining CV indicates increasing convergence.

These indicators correspond directly to the AEC Blueprint's objectives of a cohesive and integrated economy and serve as quantifiable outcomes of Bandung-style horizontal cooperation.

3.2.3. Control variables

To account for exogenous influences, the analysis includes:

- Global GDP growth (IMF World Economic Outlook),
- ASEAN external trade openness (exports + imports as % of GDP), and
- Infrastructure investment share (World Bank WDI).

These controls mitigate bias from global or structural economic shifts unrelated to SSC intensity.

3.3. Data sources and collection

Data were compiled from a combination of official regional and national sources to ensure verifiability and replicability (see *Table 3*). All datasets cover 2015–2024 to match the AEC timeframe.

All data are secondary and publicly available. No human subjects are involved. Institutional documents and statistical data are cited according to academic standards. The study adheres to the principles of transparency, reproducibility, and respect for official data custodianship.

3.4. Analytical approach

The quantitative component uses panel correlation and time-series trend analysis. Following the theoretical expectation that higher SSC intensity should correspond with deeper integration:

$$Integration_t = \alpha + \beta_1 SSI_{t-1} + \beta_2 Controls_t + \varepsilon_t$$

where $Integration_t$ represents each dependent indicator in year t and SSI_{t-1} is the lagged SSC Intensity Index, capturing the delayed effect of cooperation initiatives. Given the small- N nature (ten years) of the dataset, emphasis is placed on directional consistency and comparative interpretation rather than on econometric precision.

Complementing the quantitative assessment, qualitative cross-case analysis of programme design and implementation is undertaken for MTCP, TICA and SSTC using document analysis (annual reports, evaluation notes, and ASEAN policy papers). This allows triangulation of the statistical results with institutional evidence of how SSC programmes operate in practice.

3.5. Robustness and Sensitivity Checks

Because the available data on national SSC activities were not published for every year between 2015 and 2024, it was necessary to verify that the results reported in Chapter 4 were not artefacts of interpolation, weighting choices, or exceptional events. A series of robustness and sensitivity checks was therefore conducted to ensure the internal consistency and empirical credibility of the constructed SSC Intensity Index and its correlation with ASEAN integration indicators.

Interpolation validation: Missing observations for 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2023 were linearly interpolated between years with verified data. To test whether this treatment influenced results, the interpolation was repeated using both cubic-spline and mean-substitution methods. The resulting SSI values differed by less than ± 0.02 points across all three methods, indicating that the upward trend in SSC intensity is not sensitive to the choice of interpolation technique.

Alternative weighting of the SSC Intensity Index: The baseline index equally weighted three normalised components: (a) number of training participants, (b) co-operation budget (constant 2020 USD), and (c) partner-country diversity. Two alternative specifications were tested—one assigning double weight to budgets and another double weight to participant numbers. In both cases, the correlation between SSI and integration indicators (trade share, FDI share, and GDP-per-capita convergence) changed by less than 0.05 in absolute value, confirming stability in direction and magnitude.

Lag-structure testing: Given that SSC projects may influence economic outcomes with a delay, the baseline one-year lag was compared with a two-year lag of SSI. The sign and statistical significance of all estimated coefficients remained consistent, demonstrating that the observed relationships are robust to short-term temporal shifts.

Outlier exclusion: To account for pandemic-related distortions, the 2020–2021 observations were temporarily excluded. Although the strength of the trade coefficient

decreased slightly, the overall direction of effects remained unchanged, suggesting that the positive SSC–integration association is not driven by pandemic anomalies.

Cross-dataset verification: ASEANstats data on intra-ASEAN trade and investment were cross-checked with equivalent series from UNCTADstat and the World Bank’s World Development Indicators (WDI). Discrepancies across sources were within two to three per cent, an acceptable range for regional aggregates, confirming the reliability of macro-integration indicators.

Together, these tests demonstrate that the principal findings—namely, the positive association between SSC intensity and ASEAN economic integration—are robust across alternative data treatments, weighting schemes, and temporal specifications. While the analysis remains correlational rather than causal, the stability of results under varied assumptions reinforces confidence in the empirical conclusions presented in Chapter 4.

3.6. Summary of methodological rationale: validity, reliability and limitations

Variables were selected directly from officially reported indicators, ensuring alignment between theoretical constructs (Bandung principles, SSC intensity, integration) and empirical measures. Cross-checking between ASEAN, OECD and national reports reduces single-source bias.

Because SSC data reporting remains heterogeneous, reliability is strengthened by using multi-year averages and triangulation across agencies. All transformations and normalisations are reproducible using standard statistical software (Stata, R).

Several limitations should be acknowledged:

- SSC financial data remain incomplete for Indonesia and Malaysia after 2020;
- Programme-level outcomes (e.g., skills transfer effectiveness) cannot be quantified;
- Causality is suggestive rather than deterministic; and
- External shocks (COVID-19 pandemic, trade disruptions) may temporarily distort regional indicators.

Table 3. Primary data sources

Data type	Variables / indicators	Primary source	Access
SSC activities	Training participants, programme budgets, partner countries	MTCP Annual Reports 2015–2024; TICA Annual Reports 2015–2024; Bappenas SSTC Framework 2020–2024	Publicly available government reports
Regional integration	Intra-ASEAN trade, FDI, GDP per capita	ASEANstats (2024); UNCTAD FDI Statistics; World Bank WDI	Open data portals
Controls	Global GDP growth, trade openness, infrastructure share	IMF (2024); World Bank (2024)	Open data portals

Note: SSC activities are drawn from official national agency publications and multilateral datasets covering 2015–2024. The Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), and Indonesia’s South–South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) are the only ASEAN Member States with fully institutionalized SSC agencies publishing regular activity data. For other members (e.g., Singapore, Viet Nam, the Philippines), SSC-related initiatives are incorporated under broader foreign-ministry or development-partnership reports rather than through separate agencies. Where data gaps exist (notably SSC budgets before 2016 or 2020 for some agencies), linear interpolation and rolling averages are employed to preserve continuity while limiting distortion. All monetary values were converted to constant 2020 USD using World Bank deflators. ASEANstats and UNCTAD provide the authoritative time-series for regional trade, investment, and development indicators, consistent with ASEAN Key Figures (2024) and UNCTAD World Investment Report (2024).

Sources: Malaysia MFA (2015–2024); Thailand MFA/TICA (2015 & 2023); Bappenas (2020); ASEANstats (2024); UNCTAD (2024); World Bank (2024); IMF (2024).

Nevertheless, the decade-long dataset provides sufficient variation to observe consistent relationships between SSC intensity and integration progress.

This methodology operationalises the Bandung framework as a testable model of regional development. By combining national SSC programme data with regional integration indicators, it enables an empirical assessment of whether horizontal, sovereignty-respecting cooperation—as envisaged at Bandung and institutionalized through ASEAN—has produced measurable integration outcomes. The next chapter applies this design through statistical analysis and cross-case interpretation to evaluate the propositions outlined in Chapter 2.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. South–South Cooperation Intensity and Regional Trends

Between 2015 and 2024, ASEAN’s South–South Cooperation architecture evolved from a loose framework of bilateral programmes into a structured, multi-tiered system of horizontal development cooperation. National agencies—particularly Malaysia’s Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), Thailand’s Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), and Indonesia’s South–South and Triangular Cooperation Framework (SSTC)—became central pillars of this transformation. Each agency expanded its thematic scope and institutional capacity, illustrating the region’s gradual internalisation of Bandung’s ethos of equality and mutual benefit (Malaysia MFA, 2015–2024; TICA, 2015 & 2023; Bappenas, 2020).

Data from national reports reveal a decade-long upward trend in participation and budget allocation. Over the period 2015–2024, national SSC budgets in Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia more than doubled, with Malaysia’s MTCP increasing from RM 19.3 million in 2015 to RM 40.6 million in 2024, Thailand’s TICA from THB 315 million to THB 649 million, and Indonesia’s SSTC framework expanding from US\$ 15 million to US\$ 30 million (Malaysia MFA, 2015, 2024; Thailand International Cooperation Agency, 2015, 2023; Bappenas, 2020). During the same decade, ASEAN’s intra-regional trade share rose from 22.3 per cent to 24.6 per cent and its intra-regional FDI inflows from 18.7 to 21.1 per cent (ASEAN Secretariat, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024). Malaysia’s MTCP almost doubled the number of training participants from approximately 1,200 in 2015 to more than 2,300 in 2024, while Thailand’s TICA recorded a similar increase, broadening its outreach to South and West Asia alongside the CLMV countries. Indonesia’s SSTC, despite operating on a smaller budget, also nearly doubled its project portfolio, with allocations increasing from approximately US\$ 7 million in 2015 to around US\$ 15 million by 2024. However, publicly available figures after 2020 remain incomplete, as Indonesia’s Bappenas (2020) and the OECD (2022) both note inconsistencies in the reporting of SSTC financial data beyond that year. The focus of cooperation shifted towards areas such as digital governance, sustainable finance, and disaster-risk management—fields that mirror ASEAN’s own policy priorities under the AEC Blueprint 2025.

Table 4. SSC-related cooperation in Southeast Asia (2015–2024)

Country	SSC Agency / Mechanism	Measurable Indicator (2015)	Latest Available (2024)	Approx. Change (%)	Primary Focus (2024)
Malaysia	Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP)	≈ 1,200 participants	≈ 2,300 participants	+92	Digital governance, climate finance
Thailand	Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA)	≈ 800 participants	≈ 1,700 participants	+113	Agriculture, public health, SME capacity
Indonesia	South–South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)	≈ US\$ 7 million budget	≈ US\$ 15 million budget	+114	Disaster management, Islamic finance

Sources: Malaysia MFA (2015–2024), TICA (2015 & 2023), Bappenas (2020), OECD (2022).

To summarise these developments quantitatively, a composite SSC Intensity Index (SSI) was constructed, combining three normalised indicators: annual participant numbers, budget allocations in constant 2020 USD², and the number of ASEAN or CLMV partners engaged in cooperation programmes. The regional SSI rose steadily from 0.18 in 2015 to 0.67 in 2024, reflecting not only quantitative growth but also qualitative diversification, as SSC moved beyond administrative training towards digital governance, environmental management, and public-health coordination. The SSI increased consistently throughout the period, reflecting both institutional strengthening and thematic expansion.

² The SSC Intensity Index is computed from the normalised averages of training participants, budget allocations (constant 2020 USD), and ASEAN partner diversity. Data are presented for the years with consistent, verifiable reporting across all three agencies (2015, 2018, 2020, 2022, 2024). Intermediate years (2016, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023) were omitted due to incomplete or non-comparable statistics but were interpolated in the regression models described in Chapter 3. Monetary values are expressed in constant 2020 US dollars using World Bank GDP deflators to ensure comparability across years and countries. The year 2020 was selected as the base year because it is the most recent harmonised benchmark across major global datasets (World Bank, UNCTAD, IMF) and lies at the midpoint of the 2015–2024 study period. This approach aligns with best practice in development-economics research.

Table 5. SSC Intensity Index (SSI), 2015–2024

Year	Malaysia (MTCF)	Thailand (TICA)	Indonesia (SSTC)	Regional Mean (SSI)
2015	0.12	0.09	0.33	0.18
2018	0.38	0.29	0.42	0.36
2020	0.44	0.47	0.39	0.43
2022	0.61	0.64	0.52	0.59
2024	0.69	0.72	0.60	0.67

Sources: Malaysia MFA (2015–2024); TICA (2015 & 2023); Bappenas (2020); OECD (2022).

Accordingly, SSI captures the gradual consolidation of SSC across ASEAN, with the steepest increase recorded after 2020, when digital delivery modes enabled agencies to overcome pandemic restrictions and broaden participation. This shift represents a qualitative leap in regional cooperation, aligning with global trends towards codified and measurable SSC frameworks (UNCTAD, 2025).

Parallel to this institutional intensification, regional macro-integration indicators also improved, though at a moderate pace. ASEAN’s intra-regional trade share grew from 22.3 per cent in 2015 to 24.6 per cent in 2024, while intra-ASEAN FDI inflows increased from 18.7 to 21.1 per cent. The coefficient of variation in GDP per capita declined from 0.82 to 0.69, indicating a modest but significant reduction in developmental disparities.

Table 6. ASEAN integration indicators, 2015–2024

Indicator	2015	2024	Change	Annualised Trend	Interpretation
Intra-ASEAN trade share (% of total trade)	22.3	24.6	+2.3 pp (+10%)	+0.25 pp/year	Gradual trade integration
Intra-ASEAN FDI share (% of total inflows)	18.7	21.1	+2.4 pp (+13%)	+0.27 pp/year	Rising regional investment
GDP per capita coefficient of variation	0.82	0.69	-0.13 (-15.9%)	-0.014/year	Convergence among AMS

Sources: ASEANstats (2024); UNCTAD (2024); World Bank (2024).

The combined evidence suggests that the period under study witnessed not only institutional deepening of SSC but also measurable progress in regional economic integration—two processes likely connected through capacity diffusion and institutional convergence. Although global conditions—particularly China’s supply-chain diversification and post-pandemic recovery—undoubtedly influenced these results, the coincidence of rising SSC intensity and enhanced integration performance merits closer examination.

4.2. Quantitative Relationships and Institutional Dynamics

To examine this connection more closely, simple correlations and lagged regressions were conducted between the SSC Intensity Index and the integration indicators. A one-year lag was introduced to capture the delayed effect of cooperation projects on macroeconomic variables. The results, presented in *Table 7*, reveal consistent and statistically meaningful associations.

Table 7. Correlation and regression results (2015–2024)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable (Lagged SSI)	β	t	R ²	Interpretation
Intra-ASEAN trade share	SSI (t-1)	+0.98	2.89	0.55	Strong positive effect
Intra-ASEAN FDI share	SSI (t-1)	+0.74	2.10	0.43	Moderate positive effect
GDP per capita CV	SSI (t-1)	-0.58	-1.85	0.37	Negative (convergence) effect

Sources: Author’s calculation based on ASEANstats (2024); UNCTAD (2024); World Bank (2024); national SSC data (2015–2024).

The analysis indicates that an increase in SSC intensity tends to precede higher intra-regional trade and investment shares, while also correlating with reduced income dispersion. Although the small sample limits econometric inference, the strength and consistency of these relationships across three independent dimensions of integration—trade, capital, and income—suggest a robust connection between SSC and ASEAN’s developmental convergence. These figures do not establish causality

but demonstrate a strong directional consistency between horizontal cooperation and economic integration.

Interpreted institutionally, these correlations suggest that SSC operates as an enabling infrastructure for regionalisation, supporting the findings. Malaysia's MTCP courses in digital governance and climate finance provided crucial administrative and policy expertise to CLMV participants, aligning with ASEAN's digital economy initiatives. Thailand's TICA strengthened human-resource capacities in agriculture and health, particularly in the Mekong subregion, contributing to greater cross-border trade in agri-products. Indonesia's SSTC extended cooperation to areas such as Islamic finance and disaster management, reinforcing regulatory harmonisation and humanitarian collaboration. These cases demonstrate how SSC serves as a platform for horizontal policy learning, helping less developed member states integrate more effectively into regional economic processes.

From a theoretical standpoint, SSC functions as a transmission mechanism for the Bandung principles of equality and solidarity. Rather than substituting for market integration, it underpins the social and institutional foundations necessary for it to occur. By reducing capability gaps and fostering administrative convergence by familiarising bureaucracies with common standards, SSC reduces transaction costs and enhances confidence among states—both prerequisites for sustained economic interdependence. The correlation between rising SSC intensity and integration performance therefore reflects more than coincidence. It lends empirical weight to the proposition that solidarity-driven cooperation can yield tangible developmental outcomes.

4.3. Synthesis, Limitations, and the Bandung Legacy at 70

The empirical results portray a region in which South–South cooperation has matured into a structural driver of integration. Over the decade 2015–2024, SSC budgets across the three principal agencies increased by more than one hundred per cent, while ASEAN's internal trade and FDI shares grew by roughly ten per cent (Malaysia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, 2024; Thailand International Cooperation Agency, 2015, 2023; Bappenas, 2020; ASEAN Secretariat, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024). The simultaneous reduction in GDP-per-capita disparities across member states further indicates that capacity transfer and knowledge exchange are fostering convergence. This pattern suggests that ASEAN's SSC architecture, though modest in scale compared

with multilateral development finance, exerts a meaningful influence on the cohesion of the ASEAN Economic Community.

Yet several limitations remain. The number of SSC-participants is not always disaggregated by nationality, making it difficult to isolate ASEAN-specific beneficiaries. Exogenous factors such as post-pandemic recovery, external investment from China and Japan, and shifts in global value chains also shape integration outcomes. Moreover, financial reporting for SSC programmes is inconsistent across countries and years, with Indonesia's figures beyond 2020 still provisional. Consequently, the SSC data series between 2015 and 2024 include interpolated values for years without published reports. Given the limited sample size and partial data availability, the statistical relationships identified should be interpreted as indicative rather than strictly inferential. Nonetheless, the persistence of positive correlations across diverse indicators and data sources enhances the robustness of the findings and reinforces the credibility of the SSC-integration linkage.

These empirical observations gain symbolic resonance as the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference is commemorated in 2025. The ideals formulated in Bandung have found institutional expression in ASEAN's SSC frameworks. What was once a political manifesto for newly independent states has become a measurable mechanism of regional development. The gradual, consensus-based nature of ASEAN's integration reflects the very logic of Bandung: cooperation without hierarchy, solidarity without subordination. Rather than rejecting globalisation, ASEAN's SSC architecture reframes it through partnership and reciprocity. In this sense, Bandung's legacy underpins the gradual construction of a cohesive, self-reliant, and outward-looking Southeast Asia.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Interpreting the Empirical Evidence

The positive correlation identified in Chapter 4 between SSC intensity and trade and investment shares, and the concurrent decline in GDP-per-capita dispersion, imply that horizontal cooperation may be operating as a levelling mechanism within the ASEAN Economic Community. What emerges from this evidence is not a direct

causal chain, but a reinforcing feedback loop. SSC initiatives disseminate technical know-how and administrative capabilities, enabling less advanced members to participate more effectively in regional markets. As capacities converge, mutual trust deepens and the transaction costs of cooperation fall, further stimulating intra-regional flows; as a result, SSC programmes have strengthened the region's internal coherence and reduced structural asymmetries. This process embodies what might be termed developmental regionalism—integration that arises through shared institutional learning rather than imposed liberalization. The ASEAN experience thus redefines Bandung's solidarity from a moral appeal into an empirical governance mechanism. This interpretation aligns with the theoretical expectation advanced in Chapter 2—that equality and solidarity, when institutionalized through sustained peer-to-peer cooperation, generate tangible economic convergence.

5.2. Bandung's Normative Legacy and ASEAN's Developmental Pragmatism

The Bandung Conference of 1955 offered a vision of post-colonial cooperation based on mutual respect, non-interference, and equality among sovereign states. Seventy years later, these same principles underpin ASEAN's developmental pragmatism. Unlike the hierarchical donor–recipient architecture characteristic of North–South aid, ASEAN's SSC model promotes a form of “horizontal developmentalism” grounded in reciprocal benefit and national ownership. The region's success in embedding Bandung's ethos into its institutions lies precisely in this pragmatic adaptation: principles are maintained yet operationalized through measurable outcomes rather than ideological declarations.

The evidence presented here demonstrates that SSC has become a functional complement to market integration, not its alternative. The Bandung ethos thus endures not as an anti-globalisation stance but as a normative framework for managing interdependence in a way that preserves sovereignty. Within ASEAN, the consensus-based “ASEAN Way” provides a procedural analogue to Bandung's moral economy. This combination—shared values guiding flexible institutional forms—explains the region's capacity to sustain cooperation amid diverse political systems and economic structures.

At the same time, the empirical analysis reveals a gradual shift from normative to performative SSC. Programmes are now judged by quantifiable indicators—training participants, budget allocations, policy outcomes—echoing UNCTAD’s (2025) call for measurable SSC frameworks. This evolution need not represent a departure from Bandung’s spirit; rather, it reflects its maturation into a modern governance logic. By converting solidarity into institutional performance, ASEAN has created a regional model of SSC that other Global South groupings can emulate.

5.3. Policy and Research Implications: Bandung@70

The 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference in 2025 offers an opportunity for ASEAN to consolidate its SSC achievements and address persistent weaknesses. The foremost challenge is transparency. Despite evident progress, public reporting on SSC budgets, project evaluations, and partner-country distribution remains uneven. Establishing a regional SSC observatory under the ASEAN Secretariat could standardize data collection and improve comparability across member states. Such an initiative would also facilitate cross-regional dialogue with other SSC hubs, including the African Union and Mercosur, thereby extending Bandung’s cooperative legacy beyond Asia.

A second implication concerns alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Integrating SSC metrics with SDG indicators—particularly 17.3 on development–finance mobilization and 17.9 on capacity building—would strengthen ASEAN’s visibility in global development forums while maintaining its autonomy. This alignment could attract triangular cooperation resources from partners such as Japan or the Republic of Korea without compromising the region’s leadership over project design and implementation.

Further research should also move from correlation to causation. The present study, limited by data availability, has shown strong associations between SSC intensity and integration performance but cannot definitively establish causal mechanisms. Future work could employ panel–data methods using expanded datasets from 2025 onwards, once new reporting systems are in place. Comparative studies between ASEAN and other regional SSC frameworks—such as the African Continental Free Trade Area or the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States—would also clarify the uniqueness and transferability of the ASEAN model.

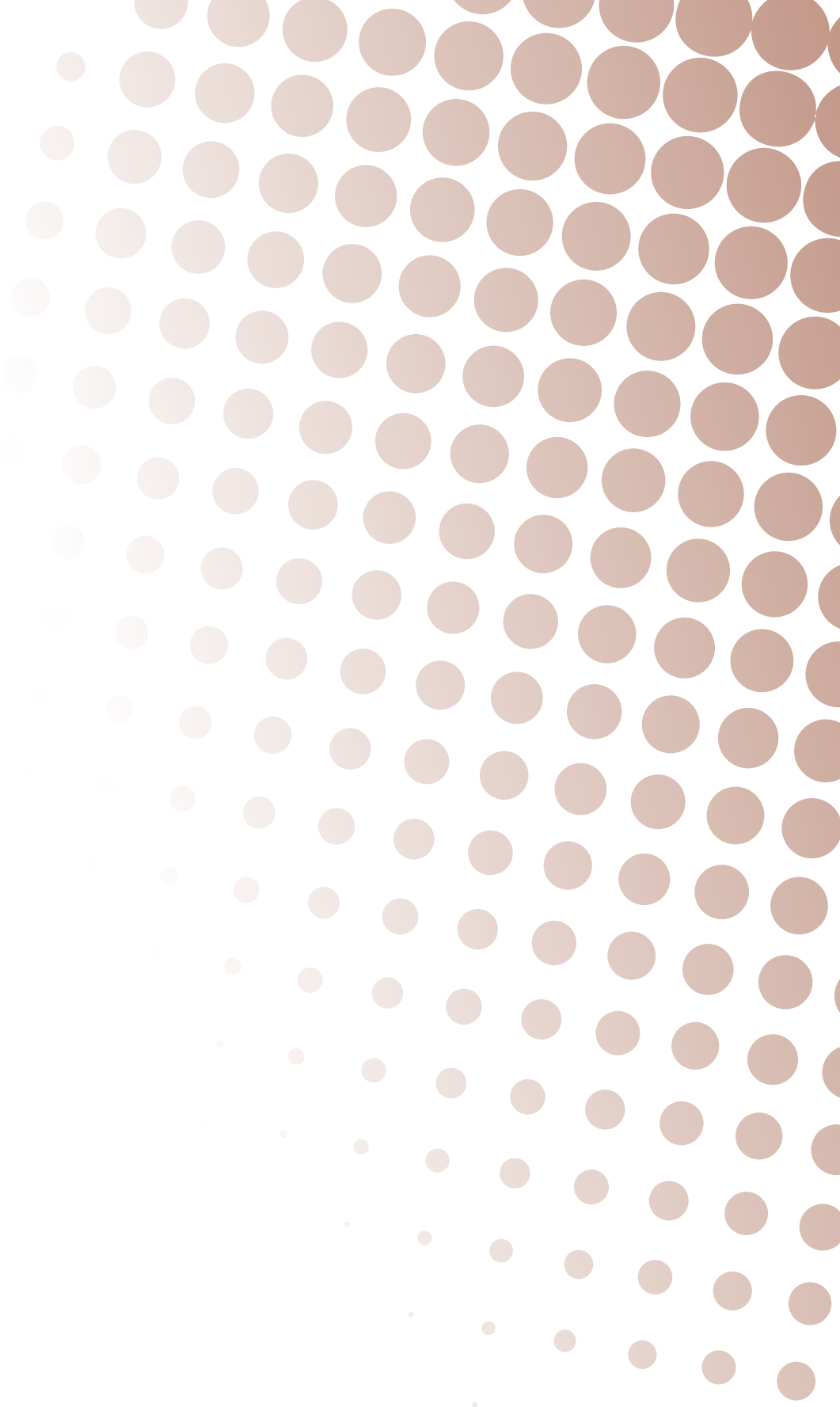
5.4. Conclusion

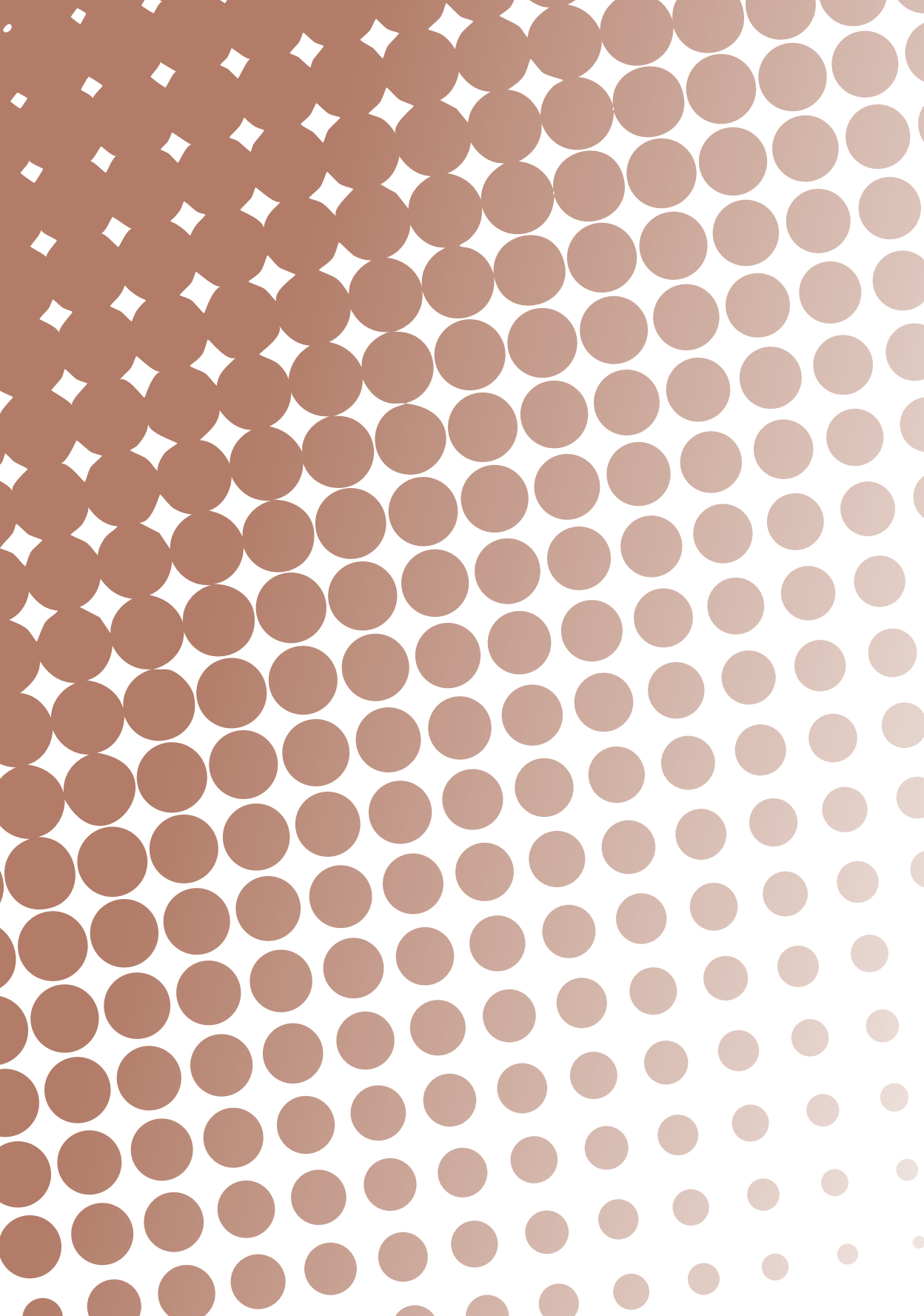
The evidence gathered across 2015–2024 affirms that ASEAN’s institutionalization of SSC embodies the enduring relevance of the Bandung Spirit. Through the cumulative activities of MTCP, TICA, and SSTC, and the coordinating role of the ASEAN Secretariat, the region has operationalised principles of equality, mutual benefit, and respect for sovereignty into a functioning mechanism of economic and institutional convergence. SSC has served as both a catalyst for and a consequence of regional integration. ASEAN’s experience stands as living proof that the ideals articulated in 1955 can still animate contemporary development logic and practice. Its further survival depends on empirical credibility and institutional adaptability—qualities that ASEAN has begun to embody. As the region advances towards the post-2025 agenda, the challenge is to sustain this balance between principle and performance.

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**THINKING
BANDUNG:
DIMENSIONS OF
SOLIDARITY AND
DECOLONIAL
FUTURES**

THE “SPIRIT OF BANDUNG” IN AFRICA

Gábor Búr¹

Abstract

This year, the world celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference. Although many people at the time of the conference said that Africa’s role had been dwarfed by Asia, this was not the case. The reason was simple; Africa was one step behind the Asian continent in the decolonization process. Since then, however, the “Bandung spirit” has been strengthened in Africa. It took several small and large steps, several generations of visionary leaders worked to ensure that Bandung would not be erased from memory. Following many false starts, African politicians, public figures, intellectuals and governments are today accelerating ambitious plans for regional, continental and inter-continental integration striving to successfully complete the emancipation process dreamed of seven decades ago.

Keywords: *Bandung Conference, decolonization, Asian-African cooperation, Pan-Africanism, Africa’s role in the world*

1. Introduction

On April 18, 1955, leaders of 23 Asian and 6 African countries, as well as delegates of liberation movements from several colonial countries, met in the Indonesian capital, Bandung. This was a celebration of the independence of Indonesia, India and of other former European colonies, of the Chinese communist revolution but first of all the reaffirmation of the self-determination of individuals and nations as the basis of all other human rights, as well as the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and equality of states, and non-interference in internal affairs (Dinkel, 2015, p. 59).

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Even contemporaries agreed that the conference was an outstanding historical event, as it was the first time that representatives of what is now known as the “Global South” came together to discuss the issues of decolonization, changes in international relations, to promote Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and to oppose neo-colonialism. As host, the Indonesian president Sukarno opened the first intercontinental conference of Asian and African nations. Sukarno’s speech was entitled “Let a New Africa and Asia be Born” and he proudly announced: “This is the first intercontinental conference of coloured peoples in the history of mankind!” (Bandung documents, 1955).

2. The Bandung Conference: Tool to Reshape Global Norms

The outstanding importance of the Bandung Conference was demonstrated by the fact that the two superpowers tried to gain ideological advantage from it. The “Pravda”, the central newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party even before the conference began, announced to the world, that the conference of African and Asian states will “express ... the will of the peoples... to decide their own fate” and “indicate . . . the ever growing struggle of the... peoples for full national independence, against colonialism, racial discrimination and economic enslavement” (Pullin, 2015, p. 53). In the US State Department consultants toyed with the idea that East European exiles, such as Ferenc Nagy of Hungary, should give “witness” about Soviet colonialism to help Asians and Africans forget “their pathological concern over the old and waning European colonialism” (Pullin, 2015, p. 53). The impact of Soviet propaganda was much stronger, especially in Africa, because the process of decolonization on the continent had not yet begun in essence, and so the argument about tired, fading European colonialism was not understood. The “common colonial experience” of Asia and Africa” (Wright, 1995, p. 56).

After the Second World War, Africa at first glance was hardly different from what it had been a quarter of a century earlier. There were no changes comparable to those in Asia, the rule of the colonialists, the “*Pax Europaea*” seemed solid. The continent was only a sideline during the conflagration of the world, its soldiers dressed in the uniforms of the mother countries in an environment that was mostly foreign to them, usually unarmed or performing auxiliary services. As for the redistribution of

colonies, the situation was similar to the First World War, although the actors had changed, but the victorious powers were once again able to take the colonies of their defeated opponents. Instead of Germany, Italy was now the big loser in Africa, losing Libya, Eritrea and Somalia, not to mention Ethiopia, which only lasted half a decade. There were five more Portuguese, two Spanish and one Belgian colonies on the continent, and the remaining territory was shared between France and England, but there were no territorial changes here. However, there were also essential differences in the effects of the two world wars, and these proved to be decisive in the long run. For the colonialists, Asia was already a hotbed of interest before the war, and national movements that often started in the 19th century demanded independence, or at least self-determination. After the war, the former mother countries were only able to restore their rule by force, sometimes with foreign help, and even then, only for a short time. The African continent was in a completely different situation, in 1945, no one could have imagined that everything would change in the short space of a decade and a half, and that most colonies would gain their independence. When the UN was founded in 1945, only 4 of the 51 states that signed the founding document were African: South Africa, Ethiopia, Liberia and Egypt. Libya gained its independence in 1951, and until 1955, no other state had achieved this, although the Maghreb, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and the Gold Coast came very close.

Six African nations were represented at the conference, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gold Coast, Liberia, Libya, and the Sudan. The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Central African Federation) was also invited and formally accepted it but the Prime Minister, Godfrey Huggins regretted his inability to attend the conference on account of pressing work at home (Appadorai, 1955, p. 210). From the African continent unofficial observers were also invited, from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia representatives of the liberation movements fighting against the French colonial rule and also from the Union of South Africa, members of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Indian Congress (Jack, 1955, p. 12). The colonial authorities made every effort to prevent the territories under their control from sending representatives to Bandung. They argued that the conference would only discuss topics that were good for Asia, and that Africans had no business there.

Some Asian participants and observers such as Jawaharlal Nehru, prime minister of India and Richard Wright, the only black American journalist covering the conference complained that “the Gold Coast and other African delegations failed to take on

substantial roles at Bandung, and Ghana and other radical African nations did not begin to integrate the Bandung ideals until after independence. Africa was very much a junior partner.” Thus, it was “up to Asia to help Africa to the best of her ability” (Jack, 1955, p. 12).

Indeed, Asia was in a more advantageous position than Africa in every respect, it was in a much more advanced phase of decolonization, and it was demographically and economically far ahead of the black continent. The African delegations stood out most with their much more colourful clothing than the Asian ones. The Ghanaian delegation, for example, wore the traditional *Ashante kente*, the festive clothing. Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to underestimate Africa’s role in Bandung. The adopted document, the “Final Communiqué of the Asian–African conference of Bandung (24 April 1955)” also testifies the importance of Africa. The Conference agreed:

“(a) in declaring that colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should speedily be brought to an end;

(b) in affirming that the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation;

(c) in declaring its support of the cause of freedom and independence for all such peoples, and

(d) in calling upon the powers concerned to grant freedom and independence to such peoples.” (Asia Africa Bulletin, 1955)

These points were equally important for both continents. However, there were also elements specifically related to Africa. The Final Communiqué set as a task the elimination of racial discrimination in South Africa and condemned France for continuing to deny independence to its North African possessions. As stated in paragraph B/2 of the communiqué: “The Asian–African Conference took note of the fact that the existence of colonialism in many parts of Asia and Africa, in whatever form it may be, not only prevents cultural cooperation but also suppresses the national cultures of the people. Some colonial powers have denied to their dependent people’s basic rights in the sphere of education and culture which hampers the development of their personality and also prevents cultural intercourse with other Asian and African peoples. This

is particularly true in the case of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, where the basic right of the people to study their own language and culture has been suppressed. Similar discrimination has been practiced against African and coloured people in some parts of the Continent of Africa. The Conference felt that these policies amount to a denial of the fundamental rights of man, impede cultural advancement in this region and also hamper cultural co-operation on the wider international plane. The Conference condemned such a denial of fundamental rights in the sphere of education and culture in some parts of Asia and Africa by this and other forms of cultural suppression. In particular, the Conference condemned racialism as a means of cultural suppression” (Final Communiqué of the Asian-African conference of Bandung, 1955).

“The Asian-African Conference deplored the policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination which form the basis of government and human relations in large regions of Africa and in other parts of the world. Such conduct is not only a gross violation of human rights, but also a denial of the dignity of man. The Conference extended its warm sympathy and support for the courageous stand taken by the victims of racial discrimination, especially by the peoples of African and Indian and Pakistani origin in South Africa; applauded all those who sustain their cause; re-affirmed the determination of Asian-African peoples to eradicate every trace of racialism that might exist in their own countries; and pledged to use its full moral influence to guard against the danger of falling victims to the same evil in their struggle to eradicate it.”

The conference became an important landmark in the struggle of African peoples for self-determination, offering new perspectives, carrying the promise of political, economic and cultural emancipation after centuries of slave trade and colonial subjugation. It can be seen as a pivotal moment between colonial and postcolonial periods (Torrent, 2016, p. 600).

Works discussing the history of the conference, or those commemorating the Bandung Conference on anniversaries, often miss the identity of those representing the African continent. The leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser attended the conference but at that time he was not yet a decisive leader of the later Non-Aligned Movement, in fact he made his debut on the international stage at Bandung. Nasser’s appearance was a great success, so much so that, in the opinion of many at Bandung “the African voice was mainly Arab” (Vitalis, 2013, p. 273). Sub-Saharan Africa played a less dominant role, yet the conference was a critical platform to bring global attention to

the most pressing problems of the region. Despite those who remember differently, Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta did not attend the event. Kenyatta, the leading Kenyan anti-colonial activist was not invited and Nkrumah, who was, decided not to go as he did not want to delay the independence of the Gold Coast by travelling to a meeting that was not viewed favourably by the British colonial authorities. He sent instead a three-man observer delegation, led by his friend, Kojo Botsio, who served at the time as minister of education of the Gold Coast Legislative Council (Vitalis, 2013, p. 267). The number one leader of Gold Coast thus received first-hand information about what happened in Bandung. The resolutions adopted there were completely in line with his own aspirations. Some historians say outright that “Nkrumah dreaded Asian paternalism and Arab competition because it threatened his own power base . . . and was concerned with how Asian paternalism towards Africa might affect his pan-African project” (Gerits, 2016, p. 270). However, this has little basis, in this initial stage of decolonization, centripetal forces dominated over centrifugal ones in the Afro-Asian region. Although the proportion and significance of African participation may be a matter of debate, it can be stated without a doubt that the Bandung Conference has clearly marked a milestone in the progress towards emergence of a post-colonial Africa. Fundamental changes can also be observed in the historiography of the topic. “Historians examining Afro-Asian relations have begun to identify the field’s thematic concerns, archives, events, and analytical methods” (Sackeyio-Lenoch, 2016, p. 236).

By the time of the Bandung Conference the “sovereign nation-state” had largely established itself as the guiding principle and goal of anti-colonial independence movements. Only an independent state seemed capable of guaranteeing complete economic and political independence from exploitation and foreign domination, but also of establishing internal unity (Deuerlein, 2020, p. 27). However, Nkrumah thought differently; for him, pan-African unity was more important than the independence of individual colonies. As a result of Nkrumah’s “independence immediately” policy, on 18 September 1956, the British Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, announced that the Gold Coast would cease to be a British colony as of 6 March 1957. Lennox-Boyd was also responsible for overseeing the decolonization of Iraq, Cyprus, Sudan and Malaya. He was also in charge for the “management” of the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya.

3. Bandung's Children: Pan-Africanist Conferences in Africa

As demanded in Bandung, a new state called Ghana was born as the first sub-Saharan step of decolonization. Even before the declaration of independence Nkrumah's Convention Peoples' Party declared, that it would call together a congress of the African national liberation movements. But due to Ghana's internal problems, Egypt "pre-empted" Nkrumah's intentions. Nasser's team organized the first Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference in Cairo, from December 26, 1957 to January 1, 1958. Not countries, but more than 500 individuals representing their peoples were invited to the event with the expressed intention: "Let Cairo be the Peoples' Bandung." (Stolte, 2019, p. 150). Delegates came from 44 countries, representing two-thirds of the Earth's population. Excluding Egypt with its 84 representatives, 129 delegates from 19 other African countries appeared in the Egyptian capital. Representatives from several colonial territories, such as Kenya and Zanzibar, were invited, but local authorities did not allow them to travel to Cairo, so a dozen students studying at British universities travelled to the conference. Apart from the 28 Soviet delegates, as well as those from China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Mongolia, the organizers tried to invite private individuals and not governmental officials. And although Sudan sent public servants, no prominent active politicians were among the African participants, and even the leader of the host Egypt, Nasser, was invited only to give a speech.

The Conference established the Solidarity Council of the Afro-Asian Countries, headquartered in the Egyptian capital and adopted the Cairo Declaration reaffirming the ten principles of the Bandung Conference and viewed itself as dedicated to "completing Bandung's work" (Jansen, 1966, p. 258). Despite the fact that specifically African topics were also on the agenda, such as request the immediate independence of Algeria and asking Africans in the French Army "to refuse to fight their brothers," and condemning racial discrimination, especially in South Africa, as well as the message: "Cairo should tell that the peoples of Africa are sick of oppression, colonialism, poverty, and racism." (Jack, 1958, p. 9), the conference focused more on the problems of the Middle East and the Arab world. The African participants were surprised by the extent to which the Hungarian Revolution and Suez Crisis dominated anti-colonial debates. This is partly due to the proportions of participants by country; Sub-Saharan Africa was significantly underrepresented. And even within this, the propor-

tions were unbalanced, with French Somaliland represented by five delegates, as was the already most populous country in Africa, the then British colony of Nigeria, or Ghana, the vanguard of Pan-Africanism. For historical (e.g. its role in the slave trade and colonization), cultural (in many ways it was closer to Asia and even Europe), and political (many African leaders feared a Moscow-Cairo axis) reasons, many people south of the Sahara questioned Egypt’s leadership role and did not accept Nasser as an African leader. All this was only confirmed by the fact that Egypt, from 1958 onwards, was a member of a brief pan-Arab union with Syria and Yemen. This meant that the geographies of Afro-Asian anti-colonial cooperation and solidarity shifted.

The name of the Solidarity Council of the Afro-Asian Countries was changed to Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) at the second conference held in Conakry in April 1960. The third biennial conference took place in Moshi, Tanganyika from February 4-11, 1963. With the changing international environment and the progress of decolonization African leaders expressed already concerns about neo-colonialism and the economic challenges faced by newly independent African nations. They criticized the European governments and the Common Market for perpetuating colonial economic structures and limiting African access to European markets, highlighting the ongoing struggle against economic exploitation even after political independence (McCann, 2019, p. 118) After the fourth conference, held in May 1965 in Winneba, near the capital of Ghana at the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute, Soviet-Chinese ideological opposition made further conferences impossible for a long time. The next, 1968 conference in Tanzania was initially postponed but ultimately never held. The organization managed to convene the next conference only in January 1972 (in Cairo), which also meant the victory of the “Soviet line” over the more radical Chinese one. The AAPSO also convened several international conferences on solidarity with the peoples of Africa in: Khartoum (Sudan 1969), Lourenco Marques (Maputo, Mozambique 1975), Luanda (Angola 1976), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia 1976), Lusaka (Zambia 1979) and Brazzaville (Congo 1986). The Cairo conference was followed by a number of specialized conferences, like the Afro-Asian Economic Conference (Cairo, 1959), the Afro-Asian Jurists’ Conference (Conakry, 1962). Today the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization has national committees in more than 90 countries in Asia and Africa, and has associate member committees in Europe and Latin America, and in his own words, he continues to carry forward the principles of the Bandung Conference. It was not good for the

organization's reputation, that a "three-Continent Conference" was held in in 1966 in the Cuban capital, Havana, where a new Afro-Asian Latin American Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (AALAPSO) was created alongside to existing organizations. Since then, there has been a danger that the spirit of Bandung will be emptied and deflated by organizations that often operate in overlapping and even competing ways.

Unlike Nasser, Nkrumah's attention, was primarily focused on the African continent. He saw the future in a federation that was beneficial to everyone, and wanted to make Accra the Mecca of Pan-Africanism and the centre of liberation movements on the continent. A series of "African Bandung" events were organized at Nkrumah's initiative. Four months after the Bandung conference, James Markham, a journalist and "Nkrumah's man in Asia", was recalled to Accra as secretary of a new "Pan-African Bureau" to organize a conference later that year. This event was only organized only with a two-year delay, mainly because Gold Coast politicians were busy negotiating with London the terms of granting independence.

4. Accra, the Pan-African Epicentre

Later than originally planned, after longer preparation, from April 15 to 22, 1958 the First Conference of Independent African States was held in Ghana. It was attended by representatives of sovereign states in western and northern Africa: Egypt (at that time officially United Arab Republic), Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia. The conference aimed to discuss issues of common interest, coordinate methods for mutual understanding, and safeguard the independence and sovereignty of participating countries. The conference also aimed to support African territories still under colonial rule in their efforts towards independence and the main role it was meant to play a crucial role in solidifying Pan-Africanist ideals. Originally, this idea was intended to achieve the unity of all African people worldwide, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality. However, for practical reasons, Nkrumah essentially restricted it to the African continent, often interpreting it as referring only to "black" Africa south of the Sahara. This is how the idea changed from a "belated boomerang of slavery" (Geiss, 1968, p. 9) not least due to the influence of the Bandung Conference into the desired state-organizing principle for Africa's future.

An even more important and long-cherished idea to convene representatives from across the whole African continent for a Pan-African meeting took place in late

1958. The organizers intended the conference, guided by the Bandung spirit, to be a continuation of the Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945 (Wallerstein, 2005, p. 103). From December 5 to 13, the All-African People’s Conference (AAPC) came together in Accra on the initiative of Nkrumah, then prime minister of Ghana. More than 300 representatives from the continent’s independent and still colonial countries appeared. Several members of the congress later played prominent roles in the independence movements: Julius Nyerere from Tanganyika, Joshua Nkomo from Southern Rhodesia, Kenneth Kaunda from Northern Rhodesia, Hastings Banda from Nyasaland, Patrice Lumumba from the Belgian Congo, Amilcar Cabral from Portuguese Guinea, and Holden Alvaro Roberto from Angola. The conference caused a great stir throughout Africa, leaders like Nkrumah, Lumumba, and Sekou Toure “have become myths; they symbolize Africa as a whole; they are the dream of African unity” (Wenzel, 2006, p. 19). The unity that everyone affirmed in words already began to crack at that point, the AAPC Chairman, Tom Mboya, rejected Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organisation’s delegates to attend the conference as “agents of Nasserite manipulation” (McCann, 2019, p. 117). The rivalry between Ghana and Egypt that had been pushed into the background came to the surface.

The AAPC meeting represented more than 200 million Africans and its outstanding importance was indicated by the fact that the leading powers of the West and the East sent observers, including the USA, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and China. The conference aimed to foster African solidarity, advocate for independence from colonial rule, and give African nations a stronger voice on the global stage. Practical issues were also on the agenda, like the call for a UN resolution to investigate French abuses against the Arab and Berber population in Algeria, Apartheid in South Africa and “settler barbarism” in Eastern and Southern Africa and British war crimes against the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. Nkrumah was convinced that former colonies would not be able to become economically independent from their European mother countries, and he saw the antidote to neo-colonialism in Pan-Africanism. “There are at present some 28 states in Africa, excluding the Union of South Africa, and those countries not yet free. No less than nine of these states have a population of less than three million. Can we seriously believe that the colonial powers meant these countries to be independent, viable states? The example of South America, which has as much wealth, if not more than North America, and yet remains weak and dependent on outside interests, is one which every African would do well to study” (Nkrumah,

1961, XII). The call of the conference was: “Peoples of Africa, Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains! You have a continent to regain! You have freedom and human dignity to attain! And to the colonialists we say: Hands off Africa! Africa Must be Free!” (Barrow, 2020, p. 11). The conference also marked the victory of “continental Pan-Africanism” over the ideological dominance of Africans living outside the continent, in North America or Europe, who represented the interests of the diaspora and were less knowledgeable about African affairs (Mulugeta, 2025, p. 5).

Nkrumah saw the future of Africa in a voluntary, mutually beneficial federation of the year by year growing number of independent countries. His intension was to make Ghana a strong driving force for this unification, and for this purpose he did not tolerate regionalism or tribalism in his own country. However, his example did not catch on. In principle, everyone stood up for African federalism or even closer union, and everyone took a stand against the “balkanization” of Africa. In their own countries, however, African leaders tried to concentrate as much influence and power as possible in their own hands as they just could. There were examples of unification efforts, but these proved short-lived and unsuccessful. After Guinea, the only French colony, refused to join the French Community established by De Gaulle in 1958, and as a result, France severed all relations with the country, Nkrumah, as a true Pan-Africanist, created a union between Ghana and Guinea, the Union of Independent African States (Union Ghana-Guinée). This union was further expanded in 1960 by another former French colony, Mali, creating the Union of African States (*Union des États africains*). Nkrumah saw the union as “a successful experiment that could lead to complete continental unity” (Griffits, 1985, p. 60). Mali was a member of another federation before this political union. Still as French-Sudan, the colony united at the time of gaining independence in 1959 with Senegal under the name Mali Federation, but the landlocked, impoverished country was a burden for the richer Senegal and its leader, Modibo Keita, feared the dominance of Senegal and did not share Senghor’s friendship with France, so the union – two months after independence – disintegrated. The same fate befell the Sahel Benin Confederation (*Conseil de l’Entente*), founded in 1959, which brought together Côte d’Ivoire, Dahomey, Upper Volta and Niger. In 1962 the union of Ghana, Guinea and Mali also disbanded and during its short existence had little practical significance, apart from the fact that richer Ghana provided a smaller loan to poorer Guinea. In Anglophone Africa, the unification of countries did not even reach this level, neither in the former British East Africa, nor

in Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Rather, the achievement is that Nigeria, which consisted of several colonial units (crown colony, protectorate), did not fall apart.

5. Bandung – More than an Anniversary

Representation through elections was new in the former African colonies. An election campaign limited to a given country, or even to a single constituency, narrowed political horizons, favoured the rise of regional, particular nationalism, and above all ethnic nationalism, but it also undermined Pan-Africanism. After the “Year of Africa” of 1960, the countries that gained independence on the assembly line were divided into two basic groups on the issue of unity, or “Balkanization”, which fundamentally determined the future of the continent. The Casablanca Group was a group of “progressive” African states that met in Casablanca, Morocco, in January 1961. It consisted of Algeria’s government-in-exile, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Morocco. The leaders of these mostly newly independent states advocated a united Africa (“Africa must unite!”) and consistent decolonization. Libya, Sudan, and Ceylon sent observers to the conference. Its leader was the President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, who believed that the creation of African unity could be achieved in the most radical way, as an immediate political unity. His goal was to effectively confront the Western powers. The more pro-Western Monrovia Group was the counterpart to the Casablanca Group and had 20 member countries, Nigeria, Cameroon, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Liberia and some former French colonies. The Monrovia Group favoured the preservation of national sovereignty, and that’s why it was viewed by Nkrumah and his followers as “neo-colonialist.” While the Casablanca Charter of January 1961 advocated a rapid pan-African unity, the participants of the Monrovia Conference agreed on “principles of fraternal relations” and on closer inter-African cooperation. Cohesion within the Casablanca group was weak, so the Monrovia group eventually prevailed and in 1963, both the Monrovia Group and the Casablanca Group dissolved in favour of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) with 32 members of signatory state as “functional cooperation which destined to articulate the common identity and aspiration of the African continent” (Adula, 2022, p. 63).

The “Spirit of Bandung” did not help unite the African continent. Even Krumah’s most consistent followers chose a different path. Julius Nyerere, the key figure in Tanzania’s independence movement celebrated historical solidarity, but stressed the

“different roads to independence and different routes to reach the one goal of economic and social well-being . . . each country must work out these things for itself” (McCann, 2019, p. 118). The nation-state ideology has won a final victory over the supra-national ideology. This marked the end of the era that began in 1955. The pressures of geopolitical competition, divergent paths to independence, and conflicting priorities among Afro-Asian nations led to the fragmentation of the solidarity that had characterized the Bandung moment. National liberation movements across Africa played a significant role in the decline of the Bandung era by prioritizing their own domestic agendas and diverging in their approaches to independence and post-colonial governance. Because of irreconcilable differences in ideological orientations, the “Bandung era” crumbled during the 1960–1970s (McCann, 2019, p. 124).

The mass euphoria after independence was replaced by an era of Africa’s disappearance from the political map of the world, in which Bandung was barely mentioned. After a decade of “Afro optimism” following the “Year of Africa” in 1960, the 1980s ushered in the era of “Afro pessimism”. Its main feature was the marginalization of African states and many researchers used this phrase even in the early 2000s to explain the ongoing crisis in sub-Saharan Africa. Corruption became a significant challenge, hindering economic growth, undermining governance, and exacerbating inequality. It diverted resources from vital public services like healthcare and education, and fuelled social unrest. But it wasn’t just an economic downturn. Coups have ravaged the continent. From Algeria to Zimbabwe dozens of armed conflicts erupted in Africa since independence, affecting two thirds of the continent’s population (Herbst, 2000, p. 292). From then on, the negative stereotype that Africa is the continent of the 3 Cs, corruption, crisis and coups, became common.

The new millennium brought change into this dark picture. The rapid growth of Asia, especially China, has increased the value of the natural resources of the African continent. Economic indicators began to improve, a kind of new race for Africa began. The anticolonial legacies of Bandung gradually faded, giving way to economic cooperation in the global South. The rise of new economic powers, coupled with the decline of traditional global leaders, created a vacuum where Africa could assert its voice. In the rapidly changing world, the shift in global power dynamics presented an opportunity for Africa to move beyond being rule-takers and become rule-makers. In 2002 the Organization of African Unity, which had become a “club of dictators”, was replaced

by the African Union (AU) and have become much better guardian of the “spirit of Bandung”.

In 2005 during the 50th Asia-Africa anniversary summit in Indonesia, the Heads of State and Government committed to the establishment of the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP) with the hope of reinvigorating the former anti-colonialist traditions and to continue the legacy and vision of Asian and African leaders of the 1955 Bandung Conference. Despite the long-standing rhetoric of solidarity between Asia and Africa, in reality there are no formal institutional links at the continental level. The establishment of NAASP promised to formalise and strengthen regional cooperation between Asia and Africa, and to open more channels for economic, social and cultural relations. However, the purpose of NAASP has yet to be realised as a multilateral framework to coordinate relations between the two continents (Dlamini, 2019, p. 1).

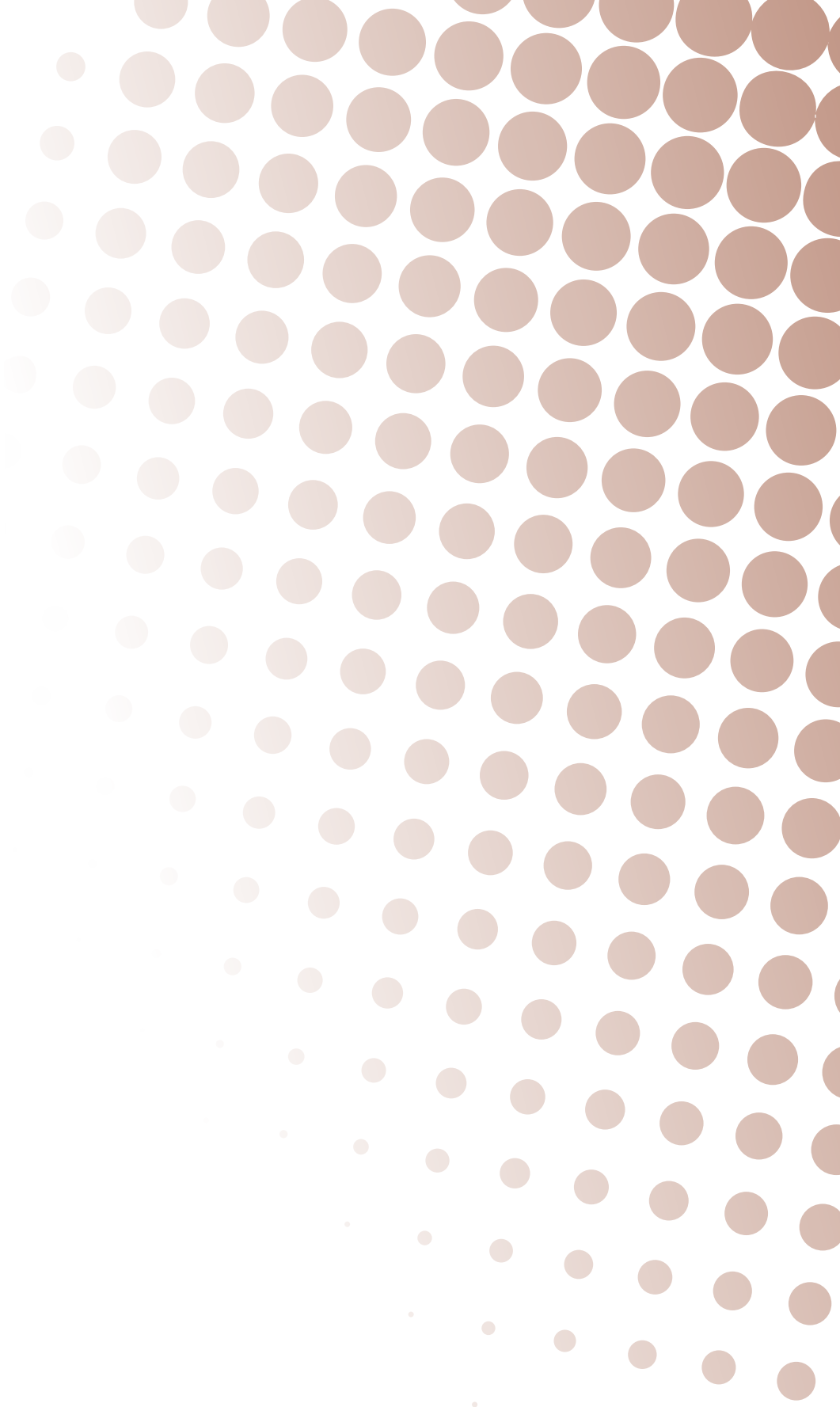
These were lofty words, worthy of celebrating a milestone anniversary, after which the event being commemorated is usually relegated to the pages of history. However, this has not been the case in Africa concerning Bandung, in the last twenty years the “spirit of Bandung” has become more relevant than ever. As a result of a long learning process, it has become clear that Africa’s role in the world is not defined by its dependence on existing systems, but rather by its ability to use its resources, diverse population, and growing economic potential to shape global affairs and secure its future. “Following many false starts, African governments are today accelerating ambitious plans for regional and continental integration” (Vickers, 2013, p. 678). 70 years after the event, the echoes of Bandung are more powerful in Africa than it was during the Cold War. As Alvin Botes, member of the South African Parliament and Deputy Minister of International Relations and Co-operation summed up his opinion: “Bandung’s anniversary is more than a commemoration; it is a clarion call for unity, dignity, and justice from the Global South in a world plagued by coercion, division, war, and ecological collapse” (Botes, 2025). Without a doubt, in the shifting World Order in the current international landscape the so called “Bandung Nostalgia” is stronger in Africa today than ever.

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AN EXERCISE IN CO-EXISTENCE: THE 1955 BANDUNG CONFERENCE AND THE QUESTION OF (NON-)ALIGNMENT

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Abstract

The 1955 Bandung Conference is often regarded as a watershed moment when it comes to decolonisation, Afro-Asian solidarity, and the Non-Aligned Movement. To better understand its dynamics, this paper aims to examine – based on the available primary sources, including session minutes and delegate recollections – the discourse on non-alignment and power blocs before and during the conference. I found that the escalating Cold War tensions of the 1950s both necessitated the conference and contributed to the differing, often contradictory viewpoints of the 29 delegations. These divisions – as will be shown – were evident throughout the conference and even resulted in ambiguity concerning the final declaration, particularly regarding military alliances. Consequently, I believe that the conference’s significance lies in its normative and educative aspects, as well as in its role in fostering a shared post-colonial identity.

Keywords: *Bandung, Asian-African Conference, non-alignment, military blocs, peaceful coexistence*

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1. Introduction

It is fairly well known that the so-called Bandung Principles laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement. However, much less attention has been paid to the fact that the majority of the 29 states did not pursue a course of foreign policy which could be described as either neutral or non-aligned. For instance, Turkey was a member of NATO; Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines had joined SEATO a few months before the Bandung Conference; and the People's Republic of China was part of the communist bloc. The primary objective of this paper is to examine – based on the available primary sources, including minutes of the sessions and the recollections of the delegates – how the issue of non-alignment and power blocs were raised and discussed before and during the Asian-African Conference. Following this examination, I also wish to reflect on the significance of the Bandung Conference.

2. Historical Context

2.1. The Colombo Conference

The idea of an Asian-African conference was first floated by Ali Sastroamidjojo at the Asian Prime Ministers Conference held at Colombo between April 28 and May 2, 1954 (Sastroamidjojo, 1974, p. 460). However, the Indonesian Prime Minister's proposal did not receive resounding support as the participants had more pressing issues on their mind. The Colombo Conference was initially intended to be a “friendly and informal” forum where neighbouring countries could discuss matters of mutual interest (Kotelawala, 1956, p. 118). When Ceylonese Prime Minister, Sir John Kotelawala, invited the premiers of India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Burma; he did not set an agenda for the conference in advance. Nonetheless, the fact that the Geneva Conference was convened two days earlier, on April 26, essentially set one of the main items of the meetings. The so-called “Colombo Powers” felt that they had a responsibility as representatives of Asian nations to contribute to the peace talks focusing on the Korean Peninsula and Indochina. During the discussions, particularly on Indochina, Ali Sastroamidjojo suggested jointly calling for the admission of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the United Nations, as it might prompt the Viet Minh forces to accept a ceasefire (Benvenuti, 2024, p. 58). However, Pakistani Prime Minister Mo-

ammed Ali strongly opposed the proposal. Sir John Kotelawala voiced his concerns as well. Understandably, he was about to introduce a draft resolution condemning “international communism” and its attempts to “infiltrate into non-communist territories” (Kotelawala, 1956, p. 124). While Mohammed Ali backed the motion, Nehru uncompromisingly rejected it because the adoption of the resolution “... would amount to aligning itself with one of the two great powers in the cold war” (Nehru, 1999, p. 430), a step completely contrary to India’s policy of non-alignment. Beyond India’s neutralist stance, other considerations played a significant role in Nehru’s stern opposition, which he communicated to the Asian leaders during the deliberations.

India and the People’s Republic of China signed the “Agreement on Trade and Intercourse Between Tibet Region and India” on April 29, 1954, which would have been certainly undermined by India’s official condemnation of international communism at Colombo. Negotiations between the two powers had been underway since December 1953. Reaching a compromise was facilitated by the PRC’s new course of foreign policy outlined by the Chinese Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zhou En-lai, in June 1953: “we advocate resolving all international disputes through peaceful negotiations... We should practice peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition among all different systems” (Zhang, 2007, p. 511). The negotiations between India and the PRC were conducted in accordance with the aforementioned lines, which were also included in the preamble of the agreement. These principles – i.e., mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existing – later became known as the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” (Zhang, 2007, p. 513). Afterwards, both signatories made a conscious effort to popularise the five principles, also known as *Panchsheel* or *Pancasila*, with the objective of establishing a new basis for international relations in the region.

Following Nehru’s remarks concerning the “Panchsheel Agreement”, the Colombo Powers began working on the wording of a communique that was acceptable to all participants. In the end, it was decided not to link the question of the PRC’s admission to the United Nations with the ongoing negotiations on Indochina as it might create obstacles to the peace process. Nevertheless, it was agreed by the Asian premiers that the inclusion of China in the UN “... would help to promote stability in Asia, ease world tensions, and bringing about a more realistic approach to the problems concerning the world, particularly in the Far East” (Current notes, 1954, p. 399).

As for Kotelawala's draft resolution on condemning international communism, the Prime Ministers agreed – as a compromise – that they condemn all forms of external interference, whether carried out by communist or anti-communist agencies (Current notes, 1954, p. 400). With regard to the question of holding an Asian-African conference, not all participants shared the Indonesian Prime Minister's enthusiasm. Notably, Nehru voiced concerns regarding the difficulties the organisation of such a conference would entail (Sastroamidjojo, 1974, p. 465). Consequently, the communique only referenced the proposal to the extent that all the participants favoured the idea and that Ali Sastroamidjojo "might explore the possibility of such a conference" (Sastroamidjojo, 1974, p. 466). Instead of the initial enthusiasm of the Colombo Powers, it was rather the escalation of Cold War tensions that highlighted the possible advantages of holding a conference, thus making the five Prime Ministers more inclined to eventually accept the proposal put forward by Ali.

2.2. The Road to Bandung

The Cold War tensions mentioned in the previous section revolved around the Geneva Conference, particularly around the settlement of the Indochinese question. Even before the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles voiced his concern over the weakening position of France in Indochina and contemplated "some form of regional grouping in Southeast Asia for defense purposes" (Ang, 2022, p. 26). A few days later, he called for "united action" in Indochina in a speech entitled "The Threat of a Red Asia". Afterwards, Dulles flew to London on April 10, 1954, in order to discuss the specifics of the proposed united action with British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Eden. Based on the telegram sent to the Department of State by the American Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Wintthrop W. Aldrich, Eden showed interest in the proposal. However, he also made it clear that any public discussion of a coalition must be postponed to after the conclusion of the Geneva Conference (FRUS 1952-54, VI/I/435). Unlike Eden, Dulles remained sceptical that a "satisfactory settlement" could be reached and therefore continued to focus on the matter of collective security (Kaplan et al., 1990, p. 155). US fears of communist expansion were reinforced by the fact that the "international debut" of the People's Republic of China occurred at the Geneva Conference. To compound the situation, Zhou En-lai flew to New Delhi during a recess and issued a joint statement with Nehru on June 28 that the Indochinese question should be

settled based on the five principles (Mason, 2011, pp. 6-7). Following the statement, Zhou visited Rangoon as well, during which Burmese premier U Nu also publicly ascribed to the five principles. In the end, the Eisenhower administration did not sign the Geneva Accords issued on July 21, 1954 (Ewing, 2019, pp. 9-12).

Following the Geneva Conference, discussions concerning a “defensive organisation in South-East Asia and South-West Pacific” gained momentum. Due to the significance of the Colombo Communique, and its recommendations’ adoption at Geneva, the Colombo Powers were approached to join and thus provide more legitimacy to the proposed security coalition. Based on the available accounts, it was Nehru who most unequivocally rejected the idea of what later became the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). In his answer to Anthony Eden, the Indian Prime Minister remarked that since the purpose of the organisation would be to safeguard peace and stability in the region against other countries, by definition, it cannot be considered a “collective peace system”, but rather a “military alliance”, which is contradictory to the policy of non-alignment adopted by India and Burma (Nehru, 2000, p. 420). Nehru argued that peace in the region should be based on the five principles. Indonesia also declined to join on the grounds that “any one-sided defence arrangement... would add a new element to the causes of tension in that area which eventually could lead to war” (Sastroamidjojo, 1974, p. 470). Burma and Ceylon similarly refused to participate in the conference scheduled for September at Manila, although they were much more ambiguous in their answers. U Nu promised to adopt a “benevolent neutral attitude”, while Kotelawala even went as far as confessing his sympathy for the proposal to the US Ambassador to Ceylon but first wished to discuss the question with the other Colombo Powers, to whom he sent a circular letter on August 3, 1954 (Nehru, 2000, pp. 423-424). However, due to Nehru’s strong objection, a meeting between the five Asian Prime Ministers did not materialise, and in the end, it was only Pakistan – one of only three Asian countries besides Thailand and the Philippines – that signed the Manila Pact on September 8, 1954 (Ang, 2022, pp. 31-33).

The establishment of SEATO further exacerbated the strained US-PRC relations, which were already tense to the breaking point due to the outbreak of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in early September. The Manila Pact was characterised in the September 13 issue of the People’s Daily as a “...military alliance which obviously serves to split Asia and wage a war of aggression in violation of the will of Asian countries” (Wilson, 1967, p. 168). In light of the developments detailed above, the

idea of holding an Asian–African conference came to the fore again. In order to gain Nehru’s support, Ali Sastroamidjojo travelled to New Delhi at the end of September (Indonesian Prime Minister’s visit, 1954). The Indonesian Prime Minister initially only envisaged a meeting among the Afro-Asian group within the United Nations; however, Nehru insisted on inviting the People’s Republic of China as well. After Nehru had agreed to participate in the conference, Ali Sastroamidjojo sent letters to the three other Prime Ministers inviting them to Indonesia with the primary objective of discussing the specifics of the upcoming conference. After almost exactly eight months, the Colombo Powers convened once again, this time at Bogor, West Java, on December 28–29, 1954.

Between Ali’s visit to New Delhi and the opening of the Bogor Conference, both Nehru and U Nu travelled to China and reinforced their commitment to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Zhang, 2007, p. 520). Consequently, the inclusion of Beijing was not a question up for discussion at Bogor if the participants wished to reach an agreement. Nehru noted that it would be a “little absurd” not to include the biggest Asian country (Nehru, 1999, p. 427). Furthermore, not inviting the PRC would have been contrary to the vision that all independent Asian and African nations should be represented at the conference, including more Western-leaning countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, or Turkey. In light of this, one of the main questions of the conference was how to set an agenda and hold a successful conference for states with such different, often contradictory backgrounds. Especially considering the fact that many of the possible invitees did not have diplomatic relations with each other or even did not recognize certain countries. To overcome this challenge, the five Prime Ministers stipulated in the Bogor Communique that the Asian-African conference will set its own agenda and procedure, and that the “... acceptance of the invitation by any one country would in no way involve or even imply any change in its view of the status of any other country. It implied only that the country invited was in general agreement with the purposes of the conference” (Asia-Africa speaks, 1985, p. 203). The main purpose of the proposed conference as specified in the communique was to promote goodwill, cooperation, and world peace; and to consider common and mutual interests such as social, economic and cultural problems, in addition to matters like national sovereignty, racialism, or colonialism (Asia-Africa speaks, 1985, pp. 202–204).

Moreover, the Colombo Powers also declared that they did not desire to “build themselves into a regional bloc” (Asia-Africa speaks, 1985, p. 203), which was of primary concern for certain Western observers as evidenced by the discussion in the US Secretary of State’s Office on January 7. The main short-term consideration behind the PRC’s invitation was the avoidance of war, which seemed imminent as a result of the escalation of the conflict in the Taiwan Strait. As for the long-term perspective, it was believed that lasting peace and stability in the region could not be guaranteed without the participation of Beijing. The expectation was that the Cold War antagonism in Asia could be eased if China broke out of its isolation and had the opportunity to interact with and learn more about other states of the region. While the non-aligned nations hoped that the PRC would adopt a course of foreign policy more independent of the Soviet Union; John Foster Dulles and his staff feared – at the aforementioned meeting – that Bandung “...would provide Chou En-lai with an excellent forum to broadcast Communist ideology to a naive audience in the guise of anti-colonialism” (FRUS 1955-57, XXI/1). Consequently, the US Department of State decided that the best approach would be to exert influence on the invited countries allied with the West by proposing “...courses of action which would embarrass Communist China and minimize the danger that the Conference might lead to the formation of an Asian-African bloc” (FRUS 1955-57, XXI/1). However, it should be noted that members of the pro-Western pacts, now including the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO or Baghdad Pact), were not unwilling participants. It is known, for example, that General Carlos P. Romulo, the representative of the Philippines, specifically asked the State Department for “basic materials” on topics that might come up at the conference (Jones, 2005, p. 857). As can be seen, approaching the opening of the Bandung Conference, most participants could be grouped into either the pro-Western, non-aligned or neutralist, or the communist camp. The aim of the rest of this paper is to examine how the inherent contradictions between these camps manifested during the conference regarding the questions of military pacts and peaceful coexistence.

3. The Bandung Conference

3.1. The Opening Sessions

The Asian-African conference was held at Bandung between April 18–24, 1955. The first two days were reserved for the opening addresses of the 29 delegations. Even though the main purpose of these speeches was for the respective states to introduce themselves and get to know one another, the animosity between communist and anti-communist countries became apparent quite early on. It should be noted that not long before the beginning of the conference, both Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia and Pham Van Dong of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam visited New Delhi and endorsed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Tan, 2008, p. 168). Soon the Kingdom of Laos followed as well. As expected, all three delegations emphasised the fact during their opening addresses. However, in addition, the representative of North Vietnam was quick to state that “...the aggressive imperialists who had been planning the continuance and extension of the Indochinese war, endeavoured to organize a military bloc directed against the Geneva Agreements” (Asia-Africa speaks, 1985, pp. 129-130).

Zhou En-lai, the representative of the only other communist state, initially yielded his time and instead distributed a written opening address, in which he called for the normalisation of relations with neighbouring countries based on the five principles, and even invited the Japanese, Philippine, and Thai delegations to Beijing for a “friendly visit” (Zhou, 1955, pp. 18-19). Nevertheless, upon hearing a series of condemnations of communism, he had a change of heart and decided to take the opportunity to make an opening speech after all. In his supplementary speech given on the second day of the conference, Zhou denied the allegations that Beijing was carrying out “subversive activities”, and added that, as a matter of fact, it is China that was the victim of such activities, primarily carried out “without any disguise by the United States of America” (Zhou, 1955, p. 55). Based on the available reports, Zhou was shocked with the level of animosity directed against China and communism in general (Kahin, 1956, pp. 35-36). However, most accounts concur in that he was able to address each accusation calmly and diplomatically, and more importantly, that he made a positive impression in a setting where most of the attendees did not have any tangible, first-hand knowledge about the People’s Republic of China.

As for the condemnations mentioned above, most pro-Western delegations criticised the inherent dangers of communism, particularly highlighting the subversive nature of the ideology. For instance, General Romulo of the Philippines characterised communism as a new “super-barbarism” and “super-imperialism”, which aims to suppress any form of opposition, including the freedoms of thought and expression (Selected documents, 1955, p. 20). The representative of Iraq, Dr. Mohamad Fadhil Jamali, raised similar concerns. Besides colonialism and zionism, he identified communism as one of three forces causing unrest in the world. Similar to Romulo, Jamali drew parallels between colonialism and communism, adding that the latter is “much deadlier” as the examples of Turkestan, the Baltic states, or Eastern Europe attest (*Asia-Africa speaks*, 1985, pp. 69-70). Consequently, the Iraqi representative called for not only physical, but ideological disarmament as well. Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, the head of the Turkish delegation, also brought up the instance of Czechoslovakia. However, in doing so, Zorlu was not only denouncing international communism, but also drawing attention to the possible dangers of adopting a neutral foreign policy, as Edvard Benes had attempted to do, at least according to the Turkish delegate. Zorlu’s speech included a brief historical overview about the emergence of the Cold War antagonism, in which he remarked that Eastern Europe had lost again its independence, and that Turkey had to face similar attempts. In light of the expansionist efforts of international communism, the Turkish diplomat argued that the only way to contain the spread of “aggression” was to unite all the nations where “the love of freedom and independence are deeply rooted” (*Asia-Africa speaks*, 1985, pp. 120-121). The issues of right for self-defence and the necessity of defensive military pacts were also raised by Prince Wan Waithyakon. The Foreign Minister of Thailand stated that as a consequence of continued attempts of infiltration, his country signed the Manila Pact in self-defence, which was the right of every nation under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. While the other representatives denounced communism in general, Prince Wan also directly implicated the People’s Republic of China by addressing the subversive activities of Pridi Banomyong, a Thai politician organising resistance from the province of Yunan. The Thai diplomat argued that the five principles would not be an adequate guarantee of security, especially the principle of peaceful coexistence, which he considered to be too vague of a term (*Asia-Africa speaks*, 1985, pp. 116-117). Seizing the opportunity, Mohammad Ali Bogra of Pakistan introduced his proposal of seven principles. The two additional principles included the “right of self-defence, exercised singly or collectively” and “settlement of all international disputes by peace-

ful means, namely, negotiations, mediation or arbitration” (Asia-Africa speaks, 1985, p. 94). In addition to justifying Pakistan’s participation in military pacts, Mohammad Ali most likely had ulterior motives as well: to settle the Kashmir dispute through arbitration and to cast India in a negative light if it refused to participate. As can be seen, the first two days of the conference, which were reserved for the opening speeches, had already introduced the problems of alignments and military pacts. It was up to the closed sessions to reach some form of consensus.

3.2. Discussions on World Peace and Co-Operation

Despite the apparent tensions, the conference – as envisaged and hoped for at Bogor – was successful in determining its procedure and setting its own agenda. With regard to the latter, the delegations agreed to five headings to be considered during the closed sessions: economic co-operation, cultural co-operation, human rights and self-determination, problems of dependent peoples, and – the most relevant to the present analysis – world peace and co-operation (Appadorai, 1956, p. 6). The discussion of the last item commenced on the afternoon of April 22. It should be noted that the delegations of the most strictly non-aligned nations, namely India and Burma, decided not to give an opening address in order to reserve time for the actual deliberations. At the closed session, U Nu was the first to address those present at the Political Committee.² The Burmese premier emphasised that taking into consideration the differing ideologies and political systems, in addition to the rate of both conventional and nuclear armament, there is no other path available than peaceful coexistence as outlined in the five principles. As U Nu phrased it: “The alternative to co-existence – if it can be called an alternative – is no existence!” (Abdulgani, 1981, p. 138). The representatives of Liberia, Cambodia, Japan, Egypt, and Indonesia generally endorsed the approach taken by the Prime Minister of Burma. The first definite rebuttal came from Mohammad Ali of Pakistan, who – once again – presented to the conference his alternative seven principles previously outlined during the opening speeches. Soon other nations belonging to military pacts allied with the West followed in reiterating their main arguments already detailed during the first two days of the conference (Abdulgani, 1981, pp. 138-139).

2 There was also a Cultural and an Economic Committee.

The main difference compared to the opening sessions was that the respective delegates sitting in the Political Committee were able to reflect on the statements made by other spokespersons. When Nehru – for the first time during the conference – asked for the floor, his primary aim was to appeal to all sides that the phenomenon of polarisation would only lead to war and destruction; therefore, lasting peace could only be achieved through the extension of the “unaligned area” based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence (Nehru, 2001, p. 108). Building on the assumption that the deepening antagonism between the two Cold War blocs would eventually set the world on a collision course, Nehru felt the need to reflect on certain arguments put forward by the pro-Western states, particularly Pakistan, Turkey, and Iraq. The Indian Prime Minister called into question Mohammad Ali’s seven principles, primarily the 5th one concerning single or collective self-defence. He stated that since self-defence is the natural right of every nation, the inclusion of the principle is redundant and only serves as Pakistan’s justification – or “cover” – for its participation in military pacts (Nehru, 2001, p. 110). Consequently, the seven principles should not be supported since military coalitions only “produce the idea of security”; while in reality, these pacts increase the instability of the international system. Further elaborating on the harms caused by military blocs, Nehru reflected specifically on the workings of NATO. In his criticism, the Indian leader called attention to the fact that NATO had moved way beyond the Atlantic region, and in doing so, the organisation became “one of the most powerful protectors of colonialism” (Nehru, 2001, p. 110). While most delegates condemned the perpetuation of colonial systems in North Africa, Nehru also stressed that it should not be forgotten that Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia were deprived of their sovereignty by a NATO member, not to mention the existence of Western military bases in the region. In addition, the case of Goa was raised as well since it belonged to another NATO member, Portugal, which – according to Nehru – approached other members of the military alliance to put pressure on India not to touch upon the issue (Nehru, 2001, p. 110).

As can be seen, the Prime Minister of India mostly reflected on the statements made by pro-Western delegates. This can be attributed to the fact that the majority of other nations had already either ascribed to the *Pancasila* principles, or did not directly oppose the concept of peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, to further nuance his critique, Nehru stressed that he did not “agree with the communist teachers” just as much as with the anti-communist ones (Nehru, 2001, p. 107). He also added that the five

principles were not a “magic formula”, but currently the best way to reduce tensions in a manner that does not harm, criticise, or condemn anybody (Nehru, 2001, p. 112). In order to underline what was at stake, Nehru argued that a war, however limited it might be, would certainly escalate into a global conflict that could easily lead to annihilation in the age of nuclear warfare. Consequently, joining military blocs was not the answer. The members of military alliances were quick to defend their lines of reasoning, especially objecting to Nehru’s remark that it was “... most degrading and humiliating to any self-respecting people or nation to become a camp-follower and lose its freedom and individuality” (Nehru, 2001, p. 109). However, the most methodical response was still to come, when the Philippine representative took the floor the next day.

Roeslan Abdulgani,³ who served as Secretary-General of the conference, recalled that General Romulo visited his hotel room following Nehru’s speech. He requested a typed copy of the address, intending to thoroughly analyse it in preparation for his scheduled remarks the next day (Abdulgani, 1955, p. 145). Romulo noted in his memoir that it was inevitable that India and the Philippines would find themselves on opposite sides as the former was a neutralist state, while the latter belonged to the “democratic alignment” (Romulo, 1956, p. 31). He opened with the claim that a neutralist course of foreign policy only benefits the communist states, as had already been referenced by the example of Czechoslovakia. Romulo added that it is therefore quite ironic that the “two most articulate champions of neutralism”, i.e., India and Burma, were joined by the People’s Republic of China (Romulo, 1956, p. 32). With regard to the question of coexistence, the head of the Philippine delegation argued that the concept was not a new phenomenon to the “free world”, it was only the communist states that could not practice it due to the very nature of the ideology. Romulo stressed that his statement was not an attack against communism, but rather an observation of one of its fundamental principles: the conviction that communist and non-communist states cannot coexist indefinitely. Romulo characterised international communism as the “source of existing world tensions” due to its aggressive expansionism (Romulo, 1956, p. 81). Consequently, he expressed doubt regarding any guarantees that these states, even if they ascribed to the five principles, would ulti-

3 Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia at the time.

mately renounce aggression. It was on this basis that Romulo sought to justify the existence of military alliances.

Countering Nehru's criticism of power blocs, the Filipino diplomat pointed out that the Manila Pact was not signed in a vacuum, it was a necessary response to the rising danger of aggression in the region, for which the United Nations had yet to develop an adequate mechanism. Notwithstanding, the Manila Pact was a "purely defensive and strictly non-aggressive" organisation, as evidenced by Article I of the treaty, which stipulates that – in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations – all international disputes should be settled by peaceful means (Romulo, 1956, p. 87). By proceeding to demonstrate that each article was consistent with the UN Charter, Romulo concluded that the Philippines could not participate in any action violating it. Furthermore, given that all eight signatories of SEATO were members of the United Nations as well, they were already bound by the Charter (Romulo, 1956, p. 87). Besides emphasising the defensive nature of SEATO, the General also refuted Nehru's accusation that the military alliances in question would be perpetuators of colonial systems. As a matter of fact, by adhering to the principle of self-determination, the main purpose of both SEATO and NATO was to counter communist imperialism, a "newer and even more dangerous" form of colonialism (Romulo, 1956, p. 89). In addition to justifying the existence of military alliances, Romulo specifically referenced the Philippines' main motive behind joining SEATO. According to him, when Nehru claimed that India would fight alone, even against both power blocs, if necessary, in order not to lose its identity, he failed to consider the viewpoint of small nations lacking comparable resources (Romulo, 1956, p. 79). As his main argument, Romulo remarked that the Philippines joined SEATO for the same reason India and Pakistan were spending almost half of their budgets on military expenses. Not because they wished to instigate a war over the Kashmir dispute, but because they wanted to be prepared to defend themselves in case of an unexpected military confrontation (Romulo, 1956, p. 80). Romulo concluded his speech with his articulation of the Manila Pact's intent: "We desire to live in peace with you, but if you attack us we shall fight back with all our strength" (Romulo, 1956, p. 91).

Following the Philippine delegate, it was Zhou En-lai's turn to address the ongoing discussion. He began his speech by acknowledging prior concerns regarding the ideological, specifically communist, implications of the term "coexistence". The Chinese premier noted that it was not the term itself that was important, but its underlying

meaning. Therefore, he would not be opposed to changing it to “Live together is peace” as articulated in the preamble of the UN Charter (Zhou, 1955, p. 57). To illustrate the intended sentiment, he referenced his private meeting with the Pakistani Prime Minister two days prior. Despite the fact that the PRC opposed “antagonistic military alliances”⁴ as they increased the threat of war, they reached a mutual understanding after Mohammad Ali gave his assurance that his country’s membership in such a bloc was not directed against China and that he had no fear of Chinese aggression (Zhou, 1955, pp. 57–58). Regarding the remarks condemning the aggressive and expansionist nature of communism, Zhou reassured those present at the Political Committee that the People’s Republic of China harboured no desire to export the revolution, nor interfering in the internal affairs of other nations. In his attempt to facilitate reaching a consensus, the Chinese Prime Minister also put forward his proposal of seven principles, which included the following additions compared to the *Pancasila* principles: not threatening each other, recognition of the equality of all races and the equality of all nations large and small, respect for the freedom of people in any nation to choose their own way of life and political and economic systems (Zhou, 1955, pp. 59–61).

As can be seen, the additional principles mainly addressed concerns raised by anti-communist delegations. Nevertheless, as the two-day discussion was drawing to a close without consensus, it was decided to establish a Formulating Committee dedicated to the issue of world peace and cooperation (Abdulgani, 1955, p. 148). The closing session of the conference was scheduled for 5pm on April 24; however, at 4.30pm, the committee remained deadlocked. Upon entering the room to inquire about the deliberation’s progress, Ali Sastroamidjojo was greeted by the sight of the delegates packing their briefcases, having already given up reaching an agreement (Sastroamidjojo, 1974, p. 504). After the Indonesian Prime Minister told the participants that the success of the conference depended on them, they returned to work and finally agreed on a compromise proposed by Nasser. During the concluding session of the conference, the 29 delegations unanimously adopted the Final Communiqué. Notably, the term “peaceful coexistence” was omitted. The compromise reached by the Formulating Committee was embodied in points 5 and 6A of the Ten Principles, also known as the Bandung Declaration. Point 5 guaranteed the right of single or collective self-defence in line with the UN Charter, while point 6A stipulated that “arrangements of collec-

4 There was no mention of the 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance at the Conference.

tive defence” cannot “serve the particular interests of any of the big powers” (Selected documents, 1955, p. 35). While a historically significant agreement was achieved, it is important to note that complete unanimity regarding the precise interpretation of the points was not attained. Members of military blocs construed the respective points as legitimising the existence of their alliances; while other states, such as Egypt, India, and the People’s Republic of China, argued that NATO, SEATO, and CENTO were constructs of great powers, thus exempting them from the Bandung Declaration. Consequently, the significance of the conference requires a more nuanced approach.

4. The Significance of the Bandung Conference

The 1955 Bandung Conference marked a historic moment in the decolonisation process, providing newly independent states an opportunity to assert their sovereignty and agency. As Indonesian President Sukarno declared it in his opening speech: “We are again masters in our own house. We do not need to go to other continents to confer” (Selected documents, 1955, p. 1). To better understand the dynamics of the conference, this paper aimed to examine the discourse surrounding non-alignment and power blocs prior to and during 1955 Bandung Conference. Based on the primary sources analysed, I argue that Ali Sastroamidjojo’s proposal to hold an Asian-African Conference was primarily realized as a result of international developments such as the intensifying tension surrounding the implementation of the Geneva Accords, the outbreak of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, and the establishment of SEATO. It is important to highlight that the divergence of views already seen in Colombo only deepened as the Bandung Conference approached, and the list of invited countries further complicated matters. The main dividing lines had already emerged before the conference, and delegations consistently represented their respective positions. While clear categorization of all countries is not possible, the main divisions generally manifested between communists and anti-communists, supporters and opponents of military alliances, and those who accepted or questioned peaceful coexistence. Pro-Western delegates largely argued that communism was an inherently aggressive and expansionist ideology. Consequently, they maintained that military alliances were necessary for self-defence, as peaceful coexistence could not be guaranteed. On the other hand, supporters of the five principles regarded the military blocs as only furt-

her exacerbating the already tense Cold War antagonism. It can be observed that all sides invoked the UN Charter in order to legitimise their viewpoints.

I believe that, above all else, the guidelines laid down in Bogor were paramount in making it possible to hold the conference and adopt the Bandung Declaration. The informal setting, the conference's ability to set its own agenda and procedure, and the emphasis on consultation and consensus – which later became basic principles of ASEAN – all contributed to its success. Therefore, given the differing viewpoints, the normative significance of Bandung should be emphasized. In addition, another aspect must be highlighted as well, which was referenced by U Nu in his closing speech: “Most of us have in the past tended to live in the little world of our own. Such knowledge as we had of the world outside was theoretical... We learned that problems which to us appeared simple and straightforward had a different appearance to our friends, and we learned the need for taking into account their attitude and feelings, and to make adjustments” (Asia-Africa speaks, 1985, p. 158). While delegations at meetings represented the official positions of each country, back-door diplomacy offered an opportunity for informal discussions as well. Outside of the formal sessions, private conversations allowed participants to better understand each other's views and to discuss important matters more freely. For instance, Zhou En-lai's well-known statement regarding the PRC's willingness to engage in dialogue with the US to ease tensions in the Taiwan Strait was a result of an off-the-record discussion. In conclusion, the 1955 Bandung Conference, guided by the Bogor principles, enabled newly independent nations of Asia and Africa – despite their diverse social, political, and ideological backgrounds – to assert their autonomy without the oversight of great powers and address shared concerns. Despite the apparent divisions, the normative considerations of the conference encouraged consultation and consensus, while its educative aspect promoted mutual understanding among the 29 delegations.

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PHILOSOPHY BETWEEN NATION AND WORLD: PANCASILA, BANDUNG, AND THE ETHICS OF RELATION

Máté Szakáli¹

Abstract

This study examines the philosophical relationship between *Pancasila*—the philosophical and ethical foundation of the Indonesian Republic—and the Bandung Spirit that emerged from the 1955 Asian–African Conference. It argues that Pancasila provided the ethical and ontological grammar through which Bandung articulated a new conception of coexistence and universality. Drawing on Indonesian philosophical sources and contemporary intercultural theory, the paper reconstructs Pancasila as a system of relational ontology, deliberative epistemology, and moral cosmology, and interprets Bandung as the externalisation of this worldview onto the international stage. Rather than treating Bandung as a historical or diplomatic event, the study approaches it as a moment of philosophical consequence: a performative redefinition of universality grounded in decolonial experience. The paper concludes that their continuing relevance lies in their capacity to offer an alternative rationality of global ethics.

Keywords: *Pancasila, Bandung Conference, universality, moral cosmology, dialogue, Indonesian philosophy, global ethics*

1. Introduction: Between Nation and World

The formation of Pancasila as the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian Republic represents one of the most distinctive intellectual projects of twentieth-century political thought. Formulated in the process of decolonisation, Pancasila emerged as

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an effort to articulate a unifying moral vision for a society defined by ethnic, religious, and linguistic plurality. Its five principles—belief in the divine, just and civilised humanity, national unity, deliberative democracy, and social justice—were not conceived merely as political slogans or constitutional formulae. Rather, they sought to define the metaphysical and ethical conditions of collective life in a plural world.

Consequently, Pancasila was more than the ideological expression of Indonesian nationhood. It also constituted a philosophical reflection on the nature of being and the moral order. The concept embodies a relational ontology in which unity does not negate difference and diversity is understood as the proper manifestation of the One. It thereby reconciles two imperatives often seen as opposed: the affirmation of universal principles and the preservation of particular identities. The guiding question that animates Pancasila—how unity can arise out of diversity without domination—continues to resonate far beyond Indonesia’s borders.

This study explores the relation between Pancasila and the 1955 Bandung Conference, situating both within a broader reflection on moral universality and coexistence. The central hypothesis is that Pancasila provided the metaphysical and ethical grammar through which Bandung articulated a philosophy of international solidarity. While Pancasila formulated an internal moral cosmos linking divinity, humanity, and justice, Bandung expressed a parallel moral logic in its call for equality, sovereignty, and cooperation. Both moments share a single philosophical concern: how to construct community—national or international—on the basis of moral dialogue rather than coercion.

Approaching Pancasila and Bandung together allows for a double perspective. On one hand, it restores philosophical depth to Pancasila, which is often reduced to political doctrine or civic education. On the other, it reveals Bandung as more than a diplomatic and geopolitical event: as a moment of philosophical articulation in which a newly decolonised world sought to redefine modernity from within its own moral traditions. Rather than importing Western conceptual frameworks, this analysis reconstructs the categories of Pancasila from indigenous philosophical sources—Notonagoro’s ontology of *monopluralism*, Driyarkara’s existential ethics of togetherness, and Kaelan’s rational reconstruction of Pancasila as an integral system of thought—and traces their transformation into an intercultural language of global ethics.

The methodological approach is comparative and hermeneutic. It treats Pancasila as a living text, a system whose meaning unfolds through interpretation across historical contexts. Contemporary Indonesian scholarship describes Pancasila as an *open ideology*, a dynamic framework within which ethical values are continuously negotiated between state, religion, and society (Pesurnay, 2018). This interpretive openness explains why Pancasila could serve simultaneously as a principle of domestic pluralism and a source of international moral discourse. It also supports a constructivist reading of Indonesia's diplomatic identity: recent analyses in constructivist international relations theory suggest that Indonesia's self-conception as a moral actor is grounded in the ethical grammar of Pancasila (Lukito, Permana, & Prasetyo, 2022).

Seen from this perspective, the Bandung Conference represents not a political export of a national ideology but the external resonance of Indonesia's moral vocabulary. The conference's language of peaceful coexistence and solidarity reflected ethical intuitions already embedded in Indonesia's intellectual culture. Pancasila and Bandung are therefore related by philosophical affinity rather than by institutional design. To clarify this relationship, the analysis distinguishes three levels of connection between Pancasila and Bandung:

Table 1. Levels of relation between Pancasila and Bandung

Level	Nature of Connection	Evidence / Interpretation
Philosophical	Shared metaphysical and ethical grammar—unity, justice, deliberation	Demonstrated through conceptual analysis of Indonesian philosophy
Discursive / Rhetorical	Common moral vocabulary in political speech and diplomacy	Evident in Sukarno's 1955 opening address and post-independence discourse
Institutional / Intentional	Explicit policy to export Pancasila internationally	Limited; formalised only in later foreign-policy rhetoric of the 1960s–1980s

Source: author's own work.

The present argument operates primarily on the first two levels. It analyses philosophical and discursive continuities rather than asserting that Bandung was a consciously designed project to universalise Pancasila.

Although the principles expressed at Bandung closely mirror the ethical structure of Pancasila, there is no evidence that the conference was conceived as a deliberate philosophical export of Indonesia's state ideology. The convergence between them arose from shared moral premises that guided both domestic and international thought. Sukarno and his contemporaries seldom used philosophical terminology, yet their vision of unity, justice, and cooperation drew from the same ethical reservoir that had shaped Pancasila since independence. Bandung thus functioned as the historical manifestation—not the strategic projection—of this worldview: a moment when Indonesia's moral imagination entered the sphere of international diplomacy.

The relationship between Pancasila and Bandung should therefore be understood as interpretive rather than programmatic. The conference did not declare itself a philosophical enterprise, yet the moral assumptions underlying its principles—respect for sovereignty, equality, and cooperation—correspond to the ethical triad of divinity, humanity, and justice central to Pancasila. This correspondence indicates a continuity of worldview rather than an act of ideological diffusion. To read Bandung philosophically is to reveal the latent structure of meaning through which Indonesia's political imagination engaged with the world.

The following chapter elaborates that structure in detail, reconstructing Pancasila as a philosophical system—a moral cosmology whose ontology, epistemology, and axiology form the ethical foundation from which Indonesia's global discourse ultimately derived—an inner philosophical architecture to which we now turn.

2. Pancasila as a Philosophical System and Moral Cosmology

The philosophical affinities between Pancasila and the Bandung spirit can only be fully understood by returning to the internal logic of Pancasila itself. Before tracing its echoes in international discourse, it is necessary to reconstruct Pancasila as a coherent system of thought—a structure of being, knowing, and valuing that defines the moral universe of the Indonesian state. This section therefore revisits the metaphysical and ethical foundations of *Pancasila*, not as historical background, but as the conceptual ground from which Indonesia's later vision of coexistence emerged.

The following reconstruction does not claim to offer an exhaustive account of Pancasila's vast philosophical tradition. Rather, it isolates those conceptual dimensions—ontological, epistemological, and axiological—that are most relevant to understanding its moral structure and its resonance in Bandung. Other aspects of Pancasila, including its theological exegeses and pedagogical applications, lie beyond the scope of this inquiry. The intention here is analytical: to uncover the internal logic that allows Pancasila to function as both a metaphysical vision and a normative grammar for political and ethical life.

2.1. Ontological Foundations: Monopluralism and Divine Order

At its core, *Pancasila* is a metaphysical statement about the structure of reality. Indonesian philosophical literature often describes it as *monopluralistic*: reality is one in essence but plural in manifestation. The first principle, *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*—belief in the one supreme divinity—expresses not theological dogma but ontological unity. Being is grounded in transcendence, yet that unity unfolds through the multiplicity of human cultures, languages, and beliefs. This understanding derives from classical Javanese and Islamic cosmologies in which the One and the Many are co-implicated: plurality does not threaten unity; it reveals its fullness.

Such metaphysical pluralism has direct ethical consequences. It situates human beings within a cosmic hierarchy ordered by moral law. Humanity stands between the divine and the social, bearing the responsibility to translate transcendence into ethical action. Hence, Pancasila's ontology already contains its ethics: to affirm being is to affirm coexistence. The concept of *bhinneka tunggal ika*—unity in diversity—does not merely describe social tolerance; it articulates the very mode of being of the Indonesian cosmos. This principle can be interpreted to constitute the “metaphysical unity of moral order,” where difference is harmonised through dialogue and cooperation (Szakáli, 2017).

This ontological foundation also explains Pancasila's resistance to ideological absolutism. It does not derive legitimacy from abstract rationalism or revolutionary materialism but from an integrated vision of reality. Existence is understood as relational, and all social institutions are called to mirror this relational unity. Such metaphysical grounding distinguishes *Pancasila* from both secular nationalism and theocratic ideo-

logy: it affirms transcendence without negating human autonomy, and it upholds plurality without dissolving coherence.

2.2. Epistemology and Hermeneutic Practice

The epistemological dimension of Pancasila is participatory. Knowledge, whether moral or political, is attained through *musyawarah mufakat*—deliberation leading to consensus. This method presupposes that truth is not a possession but a relationship; it emerges through dialogue within community. In the Javanese ethical idiom, this is embodied in *gotong royong*, mutual cooperation not only as social practice but as a way of knowing. To deliberate is to participate in truth's unfolding, and to cooperate is to enact understanding.

This dialogical epistemology also defines Pancasila as an open system. It does not prescribe fixed conclusions but provides a framework within which interpretation remains possible. Contemporary scholarship has characterised Pancasila as a *field of interpretation*—a hermeneutic space where values are re-articulated in response to historical experience (Pesurnay, 2018). Through this interpretive flexibility, Pancasila maintains philosophical continuity while adapting to new social contexts. The principle of deliberation thus functions as both political method and epistemic virtue: it transforms difference into a source of shared knowledge rather than conflict.

Historically, this epistemology has allowed Pancasila to mediate between modern rationalism and indigenous wisdom traditions. Rather than opposing reason and belief, it conceives of rationality as dialogical engagement oriented toward harmony. Knowledge serves ethical ends; it is measured not by domination over nature or others but by its contribution to justice and balance. Such a conception situates Pancasila within the broader currents of Southeast-Asian humanism, while retaining a distinctively Indonesian philosophical idiom.

2.3. Axiology: Justice as Relational Equilibrium

If ontology grounds unity and epistemology ensures dialogue, axiology provides orientation. The value hierarchy of Pancasila culminates in *keadilan sosial*, social justice. Justice here is not distributive equality alone but relational equilibrium—a moral state in which rights and responsibilities are balanced within community. The fifth principle integrates the preceding four: divinity gives justice its source, humanity its purpose,

unity its context, and deliberation its method. Justice thus appears as the synthesis of transcendence and immanence, of divine order realised in human action.

This value structure also defines the ethical substance of the Indonesian state. The legal and constitutional system derives its legitimacy from Pancasila as the ultimate normative foundation. Recent legal-philosophical analysis describes Pancasila as the *grundnorm* of Indonesian law: all legislation must reflect its moral content (Siallagan & Syuhada, 2023). In this way, the metaphysical idea of harmony is institutionalised as legal order. Justice is not merely a political objective but the manifestation of an ontological truth—the alignment of human law with cosmic balance.

Philosophically, this axiology represents a synthesis of communitarian and transcendental ethics. It rejects the dichotomy between individual and collective, conceiving both as expressions of a deeper moral unity. Freedom is realised through responsibility; equality through mutual recognition. Such values derive not from external ideological systems but from Indonesia's own moral and cultural resources. They embody a humanism that is religious without being sectarian and social without being collectivist.

2.4. The Moral Cosmos: Integration and Continuity

When considered as a whole, *Pancasila* forms a comprehensive moral cosmology. Its five principles articulate an ordered relationship between being, knowing, and valuing. The first principle provides metaphysical grounding in the divine; the second affirms human dignity; the third establishes the principle of unity; the fourth prescribes deliberation as method; and the fifth realises justice as telos. This structure mirrors the triadic relation of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Each dimension implies the others, forming what can be described as the *philosophical grammar of coexistence*.

Within this grammar, the state appears as a moral community rather than a mere instrument of power. Political authority derives from its capacity to maintain harmony between the divine, human, and social orders. Governance becomes a form of ethical stewardship, and citizenship an exercise in moral participation. Such an understanding transforms politics into philosophy in practice—the continuous realisation of unity through deliberative justice.

This philosophical system also provides the foundation for Indonesia's engagement with the world. The same moral logic that integrates diversity within the nation can extend to relations among nations. If being is relational and truth dialogical, then

international order must rest on mutual respect and cooperation. It was precisely this extension that occurred at Bandung, where Indonesia translated its internal moral order into an ethics of global coexistence. The next chapter examines that transformation: how Pancasila's metaphysical unity and ethical pluralism became the guiding spirit of Bandung's international humanism.

3. From National Philosophy to Global Ethos: Bandung as the Expression of Pancasila's Moral Grammar

The moral system elaborated in Pancasila did not remain confined to Indonesia's internal statecraft. Within a decade of independence, its ethical vocabulary—justice, deliberation, unity, and cooperation—began to shape Indonesia's diplomacy and its sense of moral vocation in the world. Bandung, convened in 1955, was not a deliberate ideological export but a historical event in which the principles of Indonesia's national philosophy found natural resonance in international politics. What appeared at Bandung was not a new doctrine but a *habit of moral reasoning* already formed through Pancasila: a way of conceiving coexistence grounded in dialogue, solidarity, and the dignity of difference (Szakáli, 2017).

By the early 1950s, Indonesian leaders had begun to imagine foreign policy as an ethical project inseparable from the country's philosophical identity (Hatta, 1957; Soedjatmoko, 1964). The same moral logic that guided Pancasila—linking divine order, human dignity, and social justice—animated an emerging vision of world order based on equality and cooperation (Notonagoro, 1951; Kaelan, 2000). In his opening address at Bandung, Sukarno proclaimed that the purpose of the conference was “to rekindle the spirit of human solidarity among Asia and Africa,” invoking *persaudaraan dunia*—the brotherhood of humankind—as a political principle (Sukarno, 1955). This appeal extended Pancasila's domestic ethos of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) into an international ethic of reciprocity.

The philosophical proximity between the *Bandung Principles* and Pancasila's moral grammar is evident. Each principle of Bandung—respect for sovereignty, equality of nations, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference, and mutual benefit—echoes one or more of *Pancasila's* ethical pillars: respect for sovereignty corresponds to just and civilised humanity, equality to social justice, and cooperation to deliberative democracy (Asian–African Conference, 1955). Yet this is not a matter of mechani-

cal equivalence. The relation between the two frameworks is structural rather than formal: both express a metaphysics of relationality in which order, whether national or international, gains legitimacy only through moral harmony. Bandung therefore embodied what might be called the *external morphology* of Pancasila's moral world.

This resonance must be situated within the broader philosophical atmosphere of Bandung itself. The conference gathered not only political leaders but also moral vocabularies from diverse civilisations. Nehru's Gandhian humanism, Nasser's Arab socialism, U Nu's Buddhist compassion, Zhou Enlai's Confucian pragmatism, and Sukarno's Pancasila-based moral nationalism all contributed to what could be described as an *intercivilisational dialogue of ethics* (Dallmayr, 2019). The resulting conversation did not produce a single ideology but revealed convergences of moral intuition across traditions. Sukarno's assertion that "Asia and Africa are not mere geographical expressions but spiritual regions of the world" captured this ethos. Bandung thus became an experiment in moral reasoning among non-Western civilisations, a deliberation about justice and coexistence grounded in lived historical experience rather than theoretical abstraction. The resonance of Pancasila within this dialogue lay precisely in its ability to articulate universality without imposing form—its conceptual openness mirrored Bandung's pluralism (Siallagan & Syuhada, 2023).

In this view, Bandung was not an isolated political event but the culmination of a longer Indonesian intellectual trajectory. Figures such as Mohammad Hatta, Soedjatmoko, and Natsir had already reflected on the moral foundations of political community (Hatta, 1957; Soedjatmoko, 1964; Natsir, 1954). Hatta's idea of *demokrasi berkedaulatan moral* (democracy based on moral sovereignty) defined freedom as ethical responsibility. Soedjatmoko wrote of Indonesia's "spiritual contribution to modernity," while Natsir and Nurcholish Madjid grounded Pancasila's principles in Islamic concepts of consultation (*shura*) and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*). Later, Ali Alatas would codify these intuitions into what he called Pancasila *diplomacy* (Madjid, 1987). These intellectual mediators show that Bandung's ethical vocabulary was prepared by philosophical reflection within Indonesia itself (Szakáli, 2017). The moral structure of Pancasila—its triadic relation among divinity, humanity, and justice—had already shaped how Indonesia imagined political community. Bandung simply expanded this conception beyond the national horizon.

A key bridge between domestic philosophy and international ethics lies in the principle of *musyawarah–mufakat*, deliberation leading to consensus. Within Pancasila,

this principle defines both knowledge and decision-making as collective reasoning oriented toward harmony (Kaelan, 2000). Bandung's procedural culture reflected this epistemology in practice: informal debates, inclusive participation, and reliance on moral persuasion rather than binding resolution (Lukito et al., 2022). What mattered was not the uniformity of outcome but the ethical process of consultation itself. Philosophically, this form of diplomacy enacted a *relational epistemology*—truth and justice emerging from conversation rather than confrontation. The humility implicit in such dialogue parallels *Pancasila's* own hermeneutic openness: consensus as moral understanding rather than compromise. Thus, Bandung did not export Pancasila; it performed its epistemology on a global stage. In this way, Indonesia's self-understanding as a moral and plural community translated naturally into a diplomacy of dialogue.

The theme of unity, recurrent throughout Bandung, also carries deep ontological significance. For Pancasila, unity (*persatuan*) is not mere political cohesion but a metaphysical condition: being itself is relational, and therefore harmony is the measure of order (Notonagoro, 1951). Bandung universalised this insight. It envisioned solidarity among nations not as homogenisation but as moral participation in a shared humanity (Sukarno, 1955). Diversity became the expression, not the negation, of oneness. In rejecting the colonial premise that civilisation is unevenly distributed, Bandung affirmed the ontological equality of peoples—a principle at the heart of Pancasila. Both frameworks thus converge on a monopluralistic ontology: unity and difference are mutually constitutive, each requiring the other to be complete (Driyarkara, 1962).

If Pancasila provided the metaphysical grammar of unity, Bandung supplied its ethical syntax. The principles of non-interference, mutual benefit, and respect for sovereignty translated abstract moral values into diplomatic practice (Asian–African Conference, 1955). Each embodies a form of ethical self-limitation: sovereignty recognises dignity, non-interference respects autonomy, and cooperation enacts justice. Together they constitute an *ethics of self-restraint*, implying that moral order requires recognition of others' freedom. This ethos, though regional in origin, expressed a universal moral aspiration—a vision of coexistence grounded not in ideology but in mutual care.

Bandung therefore stands as the first sustained articulation of a *non-imperial universalism*—a universality achieved through conversation rather than conquest (Szakáli, 2017). It demonstrated that a philosophy born in the context of national liberation could evolve into a global ethics, uniting moral imagination with political realism.

4. Bandung and the Rearticulation of Modernity: Toward an Intercultural Ethics

The Bandung Conference occupies a distinctive place in global intellectual history. It neither issued binding resolutions nor codified a doctrine, yet it transformed the moral vocabulary of international politics. Bandung proposed that justice and freedom could be grounded in ethical dialogue among cultures rather than ideological uniformity. In doing so, it rearticulated the meaning of modernity itself (Dallmayr, 2019).

Modernity in its Eurocentric conception had been equated with secularisation, rationalisation, and individualism (Eisenstadt, 2000). Bandung offered another genealogy: a *moral modernity* rooted in community, transcendence, and solidarity. This conception resonates with Pancasila's philosophical anthropology, which defines humanity as relational—neither atomistic nor collectivist but constituted through moral participation. Both frameworks reject the dichotomy between tradition and progress, showing that ethical life and modern reason can coexist within a single moral horizon (Siallagan & Syuhada, 2023).

Bandung's humanism rested on the conviction that dignity precedes power (Sukarno, 1955). Nations, like individuals, possess intrinsic worth derived from moral agency rather than technological achievement (Hatta, 1957). This view extends Pancasila's second principle—*Kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab* (just and civilised humanity)—to the sphere of international relations. Philosophically, it involves a decentring of the self: both individuals and nations are defined by relation and dialogue. Truth and identity arise from encounter, reflecting Pancasila's hermeneutic openness (Pesurnay, 2018). Bandung's moral anthropology thus becomes the global enactment of Pancasila's epistemology—knowledge through cooperation, justice through mutuality.

Equally significant is Bandung's redefinition of universality. It should be noted that Bandung's redefinition of universality was not the outcome of an explicit philosophical design. The Conference participants did not seek to theorise a new universalism; rather, they enacted it. The ethical and diplomatic practices of Bandung—the refusal of domination, the affirmation of equality, and the search for dialogue—produced, as a philosophical consequence, a reconfiguration of the universal itself. What emerged was a universality grounded in the experience of decolonisation and solidarity rather than in the abstract rationalism of Enlightenment discourse (Bhambra, 2021; Dallmayr, 2019).

Bandung neither rejected nor replicated Western universalism but pluralised it. Universal moral values—justice, freedom, equality—could arise from many civilisational sources. Accordingly, the Conference’s achievement was performative rather than propositional: it revealed, through ethical conduct, that dialogue among diverse traditions could itself generate universal norms (Eisenstadt, 2000). This plural conception parallels Pancasila’s ontology, in which divine unity manifests through manifold forms (Notonagoro, 1951). By decentring Europe as the exclusive locus of reason, Bandung inaugurated a dialogical universalism—universality as moral achievement rather than precondition (Siallagan & Syuhada, 2023). Here, Pancasila’s relational ontology provides the metaphysical foundation: difference is not a threat to universality but its very condition.

This redefinition of the universal also transformed how modernity itself could be understood. In Eurocentric narratives, modernity was often imagined as a linear progression from tradition to reason, from myth to science, and from faith to secular autonomy. Bandung introduced an alternative genealogy—one that did not oppose reason and belief, but sought to harmonise them within an ethical framework. In this view, modernity could be plural: a convergence of moral, cultural, and spiritual traditions oriented toward justice and coexistence (Lukito et al., 2022). Pancasila had already articulated such a synthesis within Indonesia; Bandung simply expanded it to a global dimension.

This pluralism situates Bandung within a broader constellation of non-Western efforts to moralise modernity. Nehru’s “spiritual socialism,” Nkrumah’s “consciencism,” Nyerere’s “ujamaa humanism,” and U Nu’s Buddhist democracy all sought to align modern political forms with ethical community (Bhambra, 2021). Yet Pancasila stands apart in grounding modernity not in ideology but in metaphysical pluralism and deliberative ethics (Szakáli, 2017). It conceives progress as the unfolding of moral dialogue rather than technological mastery. In this respect, Pancasila and Bandung exemplify what later theorists call “multiple modernities”: diverse rationalities within a shared temporal horizon (Eisenstadt, 2000). Indonesia’s vision adds a deeper dimension—a relational universalism where unity and diversity coexist as ontological partners (Driyarkara, 1962).

Seen through this lens, Bandung extended the ethical trajectory initiated by Pancasila. Where Pancasila reconciled faith and reason within the national framework, Bandung sought to reconcile civilisation and humanity on a world scale (Siallagan

& Syuhada, 2023). Both reject the divorce of morality from politics, affirming that legitimate order—national or international—rests on justice and respect (Lukito et al., 2022). The moral modernity inaugurated by Bandung differs from Enlightenment humanism: it is grounded in transcendence and community as the conditions of freedom (Dallmayr, 2019). Ethical autonomy here is relational, realised through recognition of others (Pesurnay, 2018). Bandung thus extended Pancasila's communitarian ethics into a grammar of global coexistence.

This philosophical continuity also clarifies why Bandung's moral language has endured even when its political momentum has waned. Its humanism was not a tactical alliance but a mode of world-disclosure—a way of revealing the possibility of a plural modernity (Eisenstadt, 2000). The relational ethics of Pancasila and the dialogical practice of Bandung continue to provide a vocabulary for non-hegemonic engagement in an interconnected world (Lukito et al., 2022).

The moral pluralism of Bandung resonates with parallel philosophies such as Ubuntu and Sarvodaya, which define humanity through reciprocity (Ramose, 2002). These affinities indicate a broader Global South philosophy of coexistence—a shared intellectual horizon where relational being replaces possessive individualism as the measure of modernity (Bhambra, 2021). Bandung anticipated this transformation, not as ideology but as lived moral reasoning (Szakáli, 2017).

The enduring significance of Bandung lies in its demonstration that non-Western moral systems can articulate universal principles without subsuming themselves under Western categories (Dallmayr, 2019). Bandung therefore stands as both culmination and beginning—the culmination of Indonesia's philosophical self-articulation through Pancasila, and the beginning of a global search for an ethical modernity grounded in plural humanity. Recent scholarship in comparative political philosophy has revisited Bandung as an early articulation of Global South normativity, situating it alongside African and Latin American traditions of decolonial ethics (Bhambra, 2021; Dussel, 2013). This broader interpretive frame highlights Bandung's continuing significance not only as a diplomatic milestone but as a formative episode in the global genealogy of ethical modernity.

If Bandung redefined universality through collective moral performance, its afterlife in Indonesian thought exemplifies how that universality remains a living field of interpretation. The same moral vocabulary that animated Bandung continues to inform

Indonesia's intellectual and diplomatic identity (Lukito et al., 2022). Contemporary debates on Pancasila and global governance reaffirm its role as a normative compass for ethical engagement. In a world facing renewed polarisation and ecological crisis, Bandung's relational ethics reminds us that community—local or global—depends on moral reciprocity grounded in Pancasila's metaphysical insight that being is plural, truth unfolds through dialogue, and justice is realised in cooperation (Dallmayr, 2019; Szakáli, 2017).

5. The Continuing Relevance of Pancasila and the Bandung Ethos

The philosophical relationship between Pancasila and Bandung is not confined to the historical moment of postcolonial emergence. Although the political configurations of the mid-twentieth century have changed, the moral questions raised at Bandung remain unresolved: how can freedom coexist with interdependence, how can plural societies sustain justice, and how can international order respect diversity without sacrificing solidarity? The Bandung Spirit persists not as diplomatic nostalgia but as an unfinished philosophical project—an invitation to think about coexistence beyond domination.

The relationship between Pancasila and the Bandung Spirit endures as a continuing site of philosophical reflection. Both articulate a moral and metaphysical vision that remains relevant for the crises of the twenty-first century—crises of meaning, coexistence, and universality. In a time marked by global inequality, cultural polarisation, and epistemic fragmentation, the relational ontology that underlies Pancasila and Bandung offers a counterpoint to both technocratic universalism and moral relativism.

What gives Pancasila enduring philosophical vitality is its non-closure. It is not a system of propositions but a moral cosmology that requires continual interpretation (Pesurnay, 2018). This interpretive openness transforms Pancasila from a national ideology into a method of reasoning: an ongoing dialogue between the divine and the human, the communal and the individual, the local and the universal. Such openness aligns with contemporary currents in intercultural philosophy that seek universality as a *practice* rather than a premise (Bhambra, 2021; Dallmayr, 2019). Through this lens, Pancasila becomes a hermeneutic framework—a way of thinking that reconciles difference through conversation rather than synthesis.

Bandung exemplifies the same logic on a global scale. The Conference did not produce a doctrine, but it generated a *form of thinking together*—a collective epistemic act that reimagined the foundations of moral order. Its enduring philosophical relevance lies precisely in this procedural rationality. Bandung demonstrated that moral universality could be enacted through dialogical encounter rather than posited as an abstraction. Accordingly, it can be understood as an instance of what Driyarkara (1962) described as “existential dialogue,” where truth unfolds in the ethical space between self and other.

Reinterpreted in this way, Bandung stands as an early expression of relational modernity—a modernity not defined by technological progress or linear temporality but by ethical interdependence. Whereas the Enlightenment sought universality through the autonomy of reason, Bandung intimated a universality of relation: an order in which autonomy itself depends on recognition. Pancasila provides the metaphysical foundation for this insight. Its conception of unity (*persatuan*) is not uniformity but participation in a shared moral cosmos. It anticipates what contemporary philosophers of dialogue, such as Levinas and Dallmayr, would describe as an ethics of responsiveness—a being-with-others that precedes and grounds moral obligation.

The philosophical continuity between Pancasila and Bandung thus lies less in content than in method. Both privilege deliberation, consultation, and consensus—not as procedural compromises but as modes of discovering truth. The principle of *musyawarah–mufakat* embodies an epistemology of relational reasoning, in which knowledge arises through ethical communication. In the international sphere, Bandung translated this epistemology into diplomatic practice. The act of consultation among unequal nations was itself a moral revelation: that justice requires listening, and that truth can emerge from plurality.

In contemporary terms, this logic has profound implications. The world now confronts crises—ecological, technological, and epistemic—that cannot be resolved by unilateral rationality. The relational reasoning implicit in Pancasila and Bandung provides a framework for rethinking global ethics beyond the binaries of realism and idealism, secularism and faith, individualism and collectivism. It proposes that universality is a horizon continually reconstituted through participation. This conception resonates with current debates in postcolonial and intercultural philosophy, which view dialogue as a source of normativity rather than mere negotiation (Bhambra, 2021; Ramose, 2002).

The conceptual framework that unites Pancasila and the Bandung ethos may also be understood within what contemporary scholars describe as comparative political ontology—an inquiry into the diverse metaphysical assumptions underlying political life across cultures (Dallmayr, 2019; Bhambra, 2021). From this perspective, Bandung represents more than a historical event: it reveals an alternative ontology of coexistence, where political order arises not from abstract sovereignty but from moral relation. Pancasila provides the metaphysical articulation of this order, grounding political community in an understanding of being as relational and dialogical. Seen in this light, Bandung’s philosophical relevance lies in its demonstration that intercultural encounter can itself constitute a mode of ontological reasoning—a way of knowing and sustaining the political through the practice of dialogue.

Moreover, Pancasila’s concept of moral unity continues to challenge reductionist accounts of identity. In its metaphysical sense, unity is not achieved by dissolving difference but by harmonising it within a moral order (Notonagoro, 1951). This principle remains philosophically pertinent for plural societies seeking forms of cohesion that do not require assimilation. In global perspective, it anticipates recent discussions of pluralism as an ontological condition of the world—what Eisenstadt (2000) termed “multiple modernities.” Bandung translated this insight into international ethics, suggesting that peace requires not uniform values but moral reciprocity among diverse civilisations.

To speak of Bandung’s relevance today, then, is not to appeal to history but to recognise a philosophical inheritance still awaiting elaboration. The Bandung Spirit embodies a moral phenomenology of coexistence: it discloses the world, in Heidegger’s sense, as a shared ethical horizon rather than a field of competing sovereignties. Here, Bandung may be understood as a mode of world-disclosure in the Heideggerian sense—a revealing of being-in-relation, where the world is encountered not as object but as a network of mutual presence and responsibility.

When viewed through the prism of Pancasila, this gesture acquires a metaphysical depth. The moral conversation of Bandung becomes a worldly manifestation of Pancasila’s cosmic vision: the interplay of unity and diversity, transcendence and immanence, freedom and cooperation. It thus offers a framework for what may be called post-secular ethics—an ethics that acknowledges the spiritual dimension of human solidarity without imposing doctrinal uniformity (Kaelan, 2000; Dallmayr, 2019).

Ultimately, the continuing philosophical relevance of Pancasila and Bandung lies in their capacity to redefine universality in a plural world. They invite philosophy to think not from the centre outward but from the relation itself—to treat dialogue as the first principle of reason, and interdependence as the ontological ground of justice. Their contribution to global thought is therefore neither regional nor historical: it is a proposition about the nature of moral life.

This redefinition of universality is not confined to theoretical reflection; it continues to unfold within the lived moral discourse of Indonesian society. The national arena becomes the testing ground for the very relational ethics that Pancasila and Bandung articulate—showing that the universal, in this tradition, is sustained by its capacity to renew itself within the concrete diversity of experience.

In contemporary Indonesia, Pancasila continues to function as both a constitutional principle and a living philosophy. Far from being a static ideology, it has evolved as an interpretive field through which Indonesians negotiate questions of identity, religion, and social justice (Pesurnay, 2018). This dynamic character gives Pancasila a capacity for philosophical renewal: it provides a moral grammar flexible enough to respond to global transformation without losing its ontological grounding. The same qualities that enabled Pancasila to inform Bandung's moral vocabulary—its pluralism, deliberative ethos, and transcendental orientation—now allow it to address the ethical dilemmas of global modernity.

At the international level, Bandung's moral architecture has inspired various frameworks for South–South cooperation and intercultural dialogue. The Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77, and more recent forums such as the Asian–African Strategic Partnership (NAASP, 2005) and the Bandung+60 Commemoration (2015) have invoked Bandung's ethical principles to frame development, peacebuilding, and cross-cultural understanding (Lukito et al., 2022). Yet these later efforts often remain political or instrumental rather than philosophical. What is required today is a renewal of Bandung's moral imagination: to recover its vision of relational modernity as a living resource for global ethics. From this perspective, Pancasila and Bandung together may offer a coherent philosophical response to what Dallmayr (2019) calls “the planetary crisis of meaning”—the erosion of moral universality under conditions of cultural fragmentation. The preceding discussion has traced this philosophical continuity from Pancasila's moral cosmology through Bandung's intercultural humanism to their enduring intellectual relevance.

6. Conclusions

The central hypothesis of this article has been that Pancasila provided the metaphysical and ethical grammar for Bandung's philosophy of coexistence. The preceding analysis has shown that this relationship is not merely historical but structural: Pancasila supplied the ontological and moral categories through which Bandung could articulate an alternative vision of world order. Both frameworks emerged from Indonesia's encounter with modernity, yet both redefined that encounter through a distinct relational ontology—one that grounds political legitimacy in moral dialogue and communal participation rather than domination or abstraction.

What Bandung achieved on the world stage was, therefore, not an export of Indonesian ideology but the externalisation of its ethical logic. The five principles of Pancasila—belief in divinity, just humanity, unity, deliberative democracy, and social justice—were mirrored in Bandung's call for sovereignty, equality, non-interference, consultation, and cooperation (Asian–African Conference, 1955). This structural symmetry reveals that Indonesia's philosophy of statehood was inherently cosmopolitan: it conceived the nation not as an enclosed community but as a microcosm of universal moral order. Bandung translated that internal moral structure into a form of global reasoning, thus giving practical shape to the metaphysics of relational being embedded in Pancasila.

Philosophically, this continuity reveals that Bandung was not a spontaneous convergence of political interests, but an *event of thought*—a moment when the ethical vocabulary of the Global South became self-conscious. The leaders of Bandung may not have formulated an explicit theory, but their collective practice constituted a performative critique of the Eurocentric notion of universality. By refusing the binaries of civilisation and barbarism, West and non-West, progress and tradition, Bandung enacted a different kind of universality: dialogical, reciprocal, and plural. This was not proclaimed as doctrine but realised through moral performance, in line with Pancasila's epistemology of *musyawarah–mufakat*—deliberation as a mode of truth (Pesurnay, 2018).

The study also demonstrates that the philosophical significance of Pancasila and Bandung lies in their joint challenge to the conceptual architecture of modernity. Both reject the idea that reason must be detached from transcendence, or that freedom requires separation from community. Instead, they posit a relational modernity: a moral modernity grounded in interdependence and solidarity. This framework offers

a non-Western but not anti-Western universalism—an intercultural rationality that accepts difference as the very condition of truth (Dallmayr, 2019; Bhambra, 2021).

In contemporary philosophical discourse, such a model resonates with emerging notions of dialogical cosmopolitanism and post-secular ethics. Pancasila's synthesis of metaphysical unity and plural humanity anticipates current debates on global justice and intercultural dialogue, while Bandung's ethical practice prefigures the deliberative and relational approaches to international relations that constructivist theory has only recently begun to formalise (Lukito et al., 2022). Together, they exemplify a living tradition of decolonial humanism: a form of moral reasoning that transcends the oppositions of faith and reason, modernity and tradition, local and universal.

Yet the continuing relevance of this intellectual heritage depends on its reinterpretation rather than its commemoration. To invoke Bandung or Pancasila as historical symbols is insufficient; their philosophical vitality lies in their capacity for renewal. As Pancasila remains a living moral grammar within Indonesia—constantly reinterpreted through public deliberation—it continues to exhibit how universality can evolve through situated dialogue. Similarly, the Bandung Spirit endures not in institutions but in intellectual practice: in the search for forms of coexistence that affirm plurality without hierarchy.

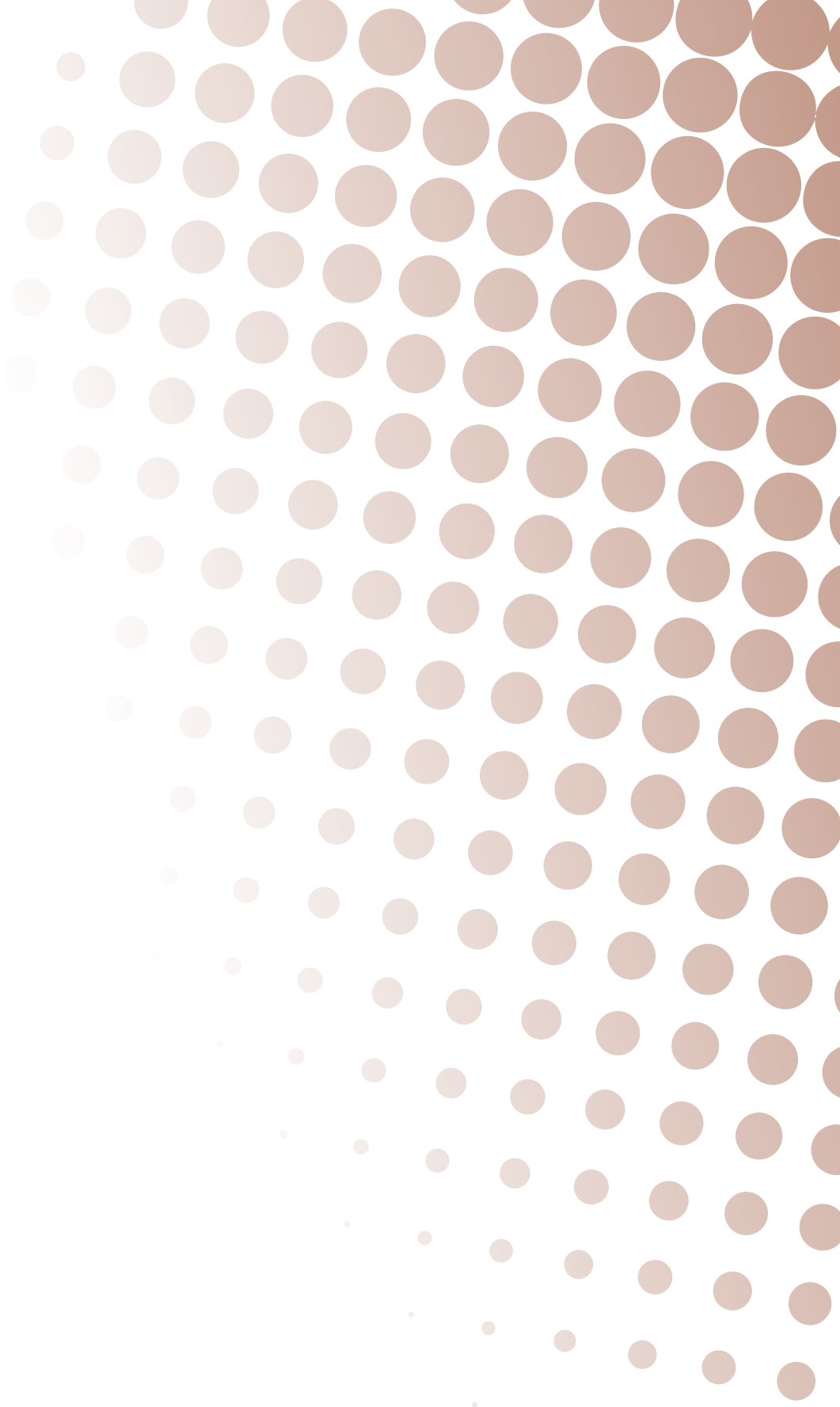
In this light, the trajectory from Pancasila to Bandung exemplifies a broader proposition for global thought: that philosophy can emerge from the ethical self-understanding of communities rather than from abstract systems. Both represent an epistemic orientation rather than an ideological position—a commitment to reasoning through relationship. In a world marked by technological acceleration and moral uncertainty, this orientation offers a conceptual and ethical resource for reimagining global order.

The enduring insight of both Pancasila and Bandung is that universality must be lived before it can be theorised. Their shared legacy affirms that truth arises in conversation, justice in mutual recognition, and freedom in solidarity. Together they invite philosophy to begin not from the solitary subject but from the space between subjects—the relational field where meaning, value, and coexistence are continuously negotiated. The Bandung Spirit thus endures not only as a historical memory but as a living horizon of moral possibility—a horizon in which Indonesia's philosophical heritage continues to speak to the world.

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EURASIA CENTER

The Eurasia Center, based at John von Neumann University in Hungary, is a multidisciplinary research institution dedicated to the systematic study of the political, economic, financial, and social processes shaping the Eurasian region. Established in 2021 with the support of the Central Bank of Hungary, the Center aims to advance a deeper understanding of Eurasia's evolving role in the twenty-first century and to foster informed dialogue among scholars, policymakers, and the broader public.

At the core of the Center's mission is the facilitation of meaningful knowledge exchange between Hungarian and international experts. Its researchers pursue inquiry across the full breadth of Eurasian studies, while also engaging in policy-oriented analysis that contributes to the public discourse on regional and global developments. This dual orientation—toward academic rigor and societal relevance—defines the Center's approach and informs its activities.

A key component of the Center's academic profile is its publishing work. It edits and distributes several major platforms for scholarly and analytical output. *Eurázsia Szemle*, a peer-reviewed quarterly accredited by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, provides a forum for research articles and case studies on the Eurasian region. The *Brief Analysis* series offers concise examinations of current political, economic, and financial issues, while *Eurázsia* magazine presents accessible commentary, cultural insights, and interviews aimed at a wider readership. The Center also regularly prepares edited volumes, such as the present *Bandung 70 – Building the World Anew*, which bring together international authors to explore pressing themes in Eurasian and global affairs.

Beyond its publications, the Eurasia Center organises a range of academic events designed to support dialogue and reflection. The monthly Eurasia Roundtables provide a setting for focused discussion among researchers and practitioners, while the biannual Dawn of Eurasia Conference has become one of Hungary's principal higher education forums for debates on regional connectivity, global governance, economic transformation, and cultural interaction. Taken together, these programmes foster sustained intellectual exchange and support a deeper understanding of how developments across Eurasia influence global processes.

Across its research activities, publications, and academic programmes, the Eurasia Center seeks to deepen Hungary’s engagement with the wider Eurasian space and to promote analytically grounded perspectives on the region’s evolving significance. In connection with the seventieth anniversary of the Bandung Conference, representatives of the Center visited the city of Bandung, staying in the historic venue where the leaders of Asian and African states convened in 1955. The delegation also toured the original conference hall, an experience that offered a direct impression of the meeting’s historical weight and the lasting resonance of the “Spirit of Bandung.”

Encountering this setting first-hand provided an opportunity to reflect on the historical foundations of post-colonial cooperation and the enduring relevance of South–South dialogue in contemporary international relations. The visit underscored how the Bandung legacy continues to inform Asia’s diplomatic culture, regionalism, and normative frameworks, particularly in Southeast Asia, where principles such as non-alignment, mutual respect, and consensus-building remain integral to political practice. This experience reinforced the Center’s commitment to examining Asia’s ongoing transformations through historically contextualised and regionally embedded research, and strengthened its interest in the intellectual, political, and institutional dynamics that shape Southeast Asia today.

The Southeast Asia Research Group of the Eurasia Center

Within its institutional framework, the Southeast Asia Research Group represents one of the Eurasia Center’s most dynamic and outward-looking initiatives. Its establishment reflects the growing importance of Southeast Asia within the broader Eurasian region and the recognition of the area as a central arena of economic and political transformation in the twenty-first century. The Research Group aims to enhance Hungary’s engagement with the region by advancing collaborative research, exchange, and dialogue with academic and professional partners.

The Research Group focuses on the study of Southeast Asia’s economic, social, and technological developments, with particular attention to the region’s pioneering role in digital finance and economic innovation. Its members are engaged in both academic research and policy-oriented projects that explore the intersections between economic growth, governance, and regional connectivity. The Group also emphasises

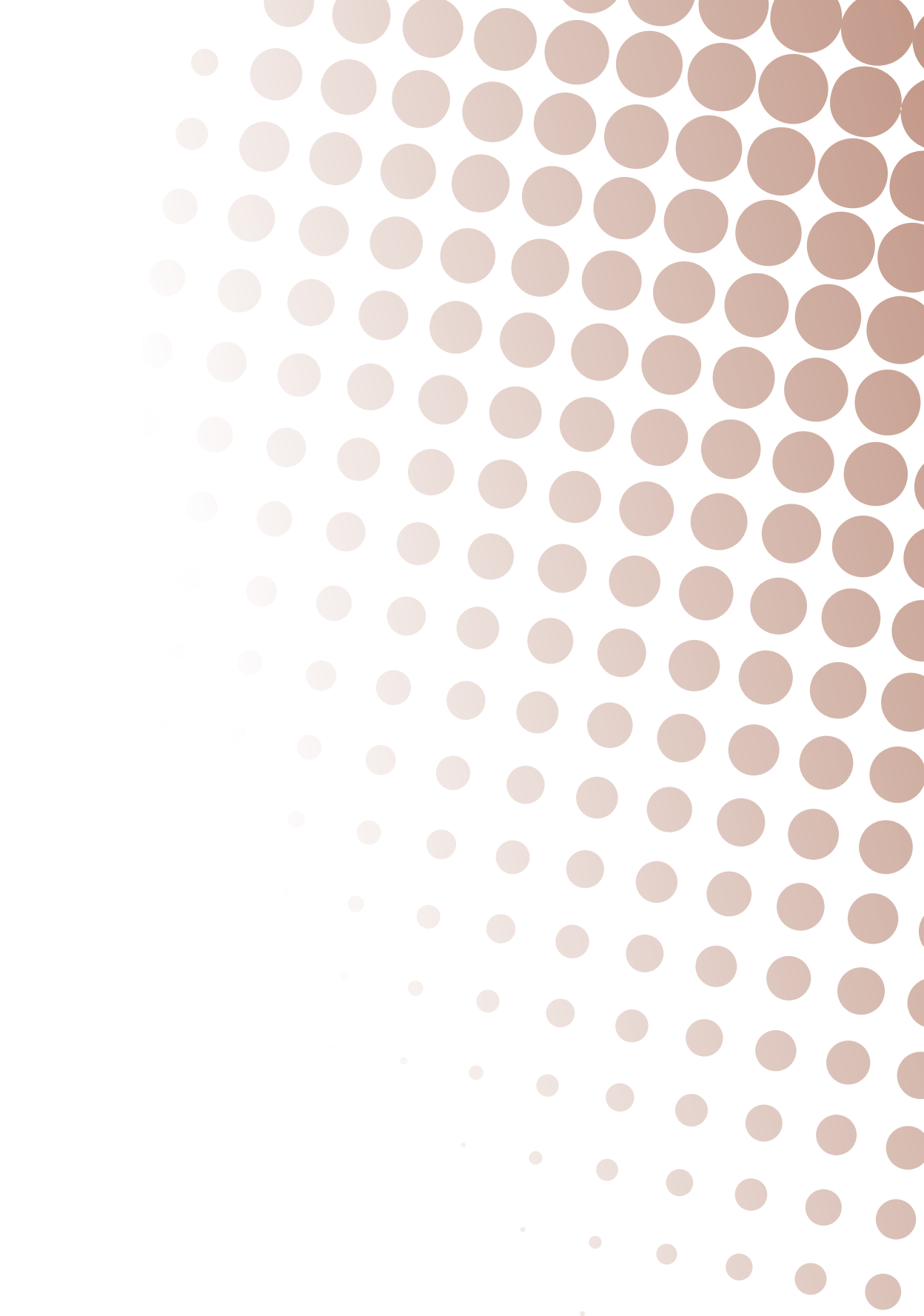
field-based collaboration and institutional networking as a means of developing a grounded understanding of local contexts.

Over recent years, representatives of the Eurasia Center and the Southeast Asia Research Group have engaged in academic cooperation and field visits across a wide range of universities and research institutions in Southeast Asia. The Center maintains active collaboration with several prominent academic partners, including Atma Jaya University, President University, and Padjadjaran University in Indonesia; De La Salle University and the University of the Philippines Diliman in the Philippines; as well as Thammasat University, Kasetsart University, and Chulalongkorn University in Thailand.

In addition to these partnerships, the Center has conducted project-based cooperation and academic visits in Vietnam, engaging with Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, the Foreign Trade University, and the National Economics University. The Research Group has also held consultations and meetings in Singapore, including discussions with the directors of research institutes at the National University of Singapore and the ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.

Through these collaborations, the Eurasia Center and the Southeast Asia Research Group seek to strengthen academic dialogue, support joint research initiatives, and deepen Hungary's intellectual engagement with Southeast Asia. These engagements have facilitated scholarly dialogue, guest lectures, and a range of joint research activities, several of which have been published in *Eurázsia Szemle*. Recent thematic issues—including studies on Southeast Asia–China relations, and connectivity paradigms across Eurasia—reflect the intellectual exchanges generated through these partnerships and illustrate how academic cooperation contributes to deeper mutual understanding and the development of new channels of collaboration between Hungary and Southeast Asia.

Through its work, the Southeast Asia Research Group advances to the Eurasia Center's broader mission: to foster research-based dialogue between cultures and to promote a more balanced and inclusive understanding of the processes shaping the Eurasian regions. By supporting academic exchange and cultivating long-term partnerships, the Research Group aims to strengthen Hungary's intellectual presence in Southeast Asia and to promote a shared vision of development grounded in knowledge, cooperation, and respect for difference.



Bandung 70 – Building the World Anew

Seventy years after the historic Asian–African Conference in Bandung, the principles first articulated in 1955 – sovereignty, equality, non-interference, and solidarity – remain central to debates on global order. As the world enters a new era of multipolarity and shifting power balances, the “Bandung Spirit” continues to offer a compelling framework for imagining more just and cooperative international relations.

Bandung 70 – Building the World Anew brings together scholars from across Eurasia to reassess the conference’s enduring relevance. The volume explores Bandung as a living intellectual and political tradition, tracing its impact across global structures, regional diplomatic practices, and the ethical foundations of coexistence. Through analyses of non-alignment, South–South cooperation, multilateralism, and decolonial thought, the contributors illuminate how Bandung’s legacy continues to shape contemporary visions of world order.

Compiled by the Eurasia Center of John von Neumann University, this collection offers fresh perspectives on one of the twentieth century’s most consequential moments – and invites readers to reconsider what it means to “build the world anew” in the twenty-first century.