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Studying the Bandung conference from a Global IR perspective

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ABSTRACT

Mainstream international relations scholarship has ignored or disparaged the significance and legacies of the Bandung conference. The author argues in favour of its importance, not only for any serious investigation into the evolution of the post-war international order, but also for the development of Global IR as a truly universal discipline: a global international relations. Few events offer more fertile ground for rethinking the established boundaries of international relations. After introducing the concept of a global international relations, the author then considers ways in which the conference's key legacies challenge conventional accounts and attest to the 'agency' of the newly independent states in the making of the post-war international order. The legacies this section focuses on include frustration at Western attempts to 'sabotage' the conference; the delegitimisation of collective defence pacts and the development of the Non-Aligned Movement; the emergence of a South-East Asian regionalism; the strengthening of emergent global norms affirming decolonisation, human rights, universalism and the United Nations; and support for the 'comity', over the 'clash', of civilisations. The author also canvasses negative legacies of the conference, including the polarisation of Asia and the encouragement of authoritarian tendencies and regional interventionist impulses. The author concludes by drawing implications of the conference for the study of global international relations.

KEYWORDS

Asian-African Conference; Bandung conference; global international relations; Non-Aligned Movement; South-East Asian regionalism

In his opening address to the Asian-African Conference at Bandung, Indonesia's President Sukarno (1955, 5) described it as 'the first intercontinental Conference of coloured peoples in the history of mankind'. Yet Western hostility, Eastern myth-making and a paucity of primary sources on the conference have obscured or distorted its true significance for international order-building. To compound matters, mainstream international relations (IR) scholarship, with its limited and parochial conception of what the field should study and how to study it, has ignored the significance and legacies of this conference. Yet few events in the post-war era offer a more fertile ground for rethinking the established boundaries of IR than the Bandung conference.

Sponsored by five countries—India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia (collectively known as the Conference of South-East Asian Prime Ministers or Colombo Powers)—the Bandung conference took place from April 18–24, 1955. It was attended by 29 independent countries: Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gold Coast, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Sudan, Thailand, Turkey, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the State of Vietnam and the Kingdom of Yemen. Cyprus, though not yet independent, also attended at the invitation of the sponsors. The African National Congress was an observer. The conference was not ‘the first international Conference of coloured’ or non-Western countries. There had been gatherings against racialism before—notably, the *Ligue contre l’impérialisme et l’oppression coloniale* (League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression) in Brussels in 1927, and the two Asian Relations Conferences in New Delhi in 1947 and 1949 (the latter was also called ‘The Conference on Indonesia’). However, although Sukarno himself recognised in his opening address to the Bandung conference that the Brussels meeting, attended by the likes of India’s Jawaharlal Nehru, was where ‘many distinguished Delegates who are present here today met each other and found new strength in their fight for independence’, the Bandung conference was distinctive because it

was a meeting place thousands of miles away, amidst foreign people, in a foreign country, in a foreign continent. It was not assembled there by choice, but by necessity. Today the contrast is great. Our nations and countries are colonies no more. Now we are free, sovereign and independent. We are again masters in our own house. We do not need to go to other continents to confer (Sukarno 1955, 6).

The first New Delhi conference in 1947 was technically unofficial, hosted by a think tank, the Indian Council on World Affairs. Participants included Tibet, as well as yet to be independent governments; indeed, the host country, India, was then still under British colonial rule and would continue to be for several months more. Both of the New Delhi conferences were not exclusively a gathering of ‘coloured peoples’: Australia, the USA and the UK attended the first as observers, and Australia was included in the 1949 conference as a full participant. Australia was not invited to the Bandung conference, but neither did it wish to be invited. As a declassified British document put it, Prime Minister Menzies

shares our [British] views of [the] mischievous nature of proposed Afro-Asian Conference and expressed annoyance at suggestions in Australia [from the Australian Labor Party] that Australia should have been invited He takes dark view of activities which, under guise of peaceful co-existence, in fact are stirring up colour prejudices (UK High Commissioner 18 January 1955).

Another British document points out that the Australian government ‘neither wanted an invitation nor the opportunity to refuse one’ (British Embassy, Washington 1955).

The Bandung conference is important not only for any serious investigation into the evolution of the post-war international order, but also for the development of IR as a truly universal and inclusive discipline: a Global IR (Acharya 2014a). Global IR is not a theory or method, but a framework of enquiry and analysis of IR in all its diversity, especially with due recognition of the experiences, voices and agency of non-

Western peoples, societies and states that have been marginalised in the discipline of IR. It takes a pluralistic approach to theory and method. Global IR embraces both mainstream (realism, liberalism and constructivism) and critical approaches, but is agnostic about the theoretical and methodological instincts and preferences of scholars. For example, Global IR has much common ground with post-colonialism, for which Bandung remains a prized subject. However, unlike some post-colonial scholarship, Global IR does not reject mainstream theories, but challenges their parochialism and urges that they be infused and broadened with ideas, experiences and insights from the non-Western world.

While the Global IR perspective has several elements (Acharya 2013, 2014a), the ones that are most relevant to the analysis of the Bandung conference may be noted here. Global IR broadens the study of world politics to include the ideas, identities, institutions, events and processes that are outside of, and challenging to, the interstate system of Europe and its colonial expansion, which have been central to the construction of the dominant IR theories. Global IR seeks to uncover indigenously driven patterns of interaction around the world, paying attention to local, regional and interregional interactions, and, through them, the agency of non-Western actors. For Global IR, true universalism is one that recognises the diversity of human interactions, rather than one that legitimises the imposition of a temporally dominant Western civilisation. Global IR also encourages the study of the ongoing global power shift, especially with the relative decline of the West and rise of new powers such as China, India, Turkey and Indonesia. Finally, Global IR recognises the close nexus between disciplinary IR and the area studies tradition, and investigates the multiple and complex ways in which civilisations interact with each other, including through a pacific process of mutual learning.

While mainstream IR scholarship, especially realism and liberalism, ignores Bandung, there is already a body of writing on the conference by several participants and contemporaneous observers, which forms a rich source for analysing the legacy of the conference from a Global IR perspective. These writings (for example, Appadorai 1955; Fitzgerald 1955; Jack 1955; Paulker 1955; Kahin 1956; Wright 1956; Romulo 1956; Abdulghani 1964, 1981) are of considerable scholarly value as sources of the conference's history, even though not written from any conventional IR theoretical perspective. Other and more recent scholarship on Bandung includes that which is historical in nature (Mackie 2005) and/or directly engages issues of contemporary IR and world order (Jansen 1966; Kimche 1973; Jones 2005; Ampia 2007; Tan and Acharya 2009; Lee 2010; McDougall and Finnane 2010). There are also writings on issues such as human rights, norm diffusion and regionalism that integrate the story of Bandung with the making of the post-war international order (on human rights, see Burke 2010; on Bandung's impact on global and Asian regional norms, see Acharya 2009, 2014b). Some of these recent writings, when framed in theory, tend to be from a post-colonial (Lee 2010) or constructivist (Acharya 2009, 2014b) perspective. At the same time, a good deal of Western political and media commentary on Bandung has viewed it mainly from the prism of interstate competition and power politics (Jansen 1966, although a diplomatic history comes closest to a realist view of the conference). Given their stress on theoretical pluralism, Global IR scholars should engage these accounts.

This essay relies mainly on a body of primary sources on the conference, including archival sources not previously available or utilised. I begin by discussing some of the key legacies of the conference that challenge the conventional perceptions of the conference and attest to the ‘agency’ of the newly independent states in the making of the post-war international order (Acharya 2009, 2013, 2014b; for earlier work that this article draws on, see Acharya 2009, 2011, 2014b). In the concluding section of this essay, I will draw some implications of the conference for the study of Global IR. Among the legacies highlighted are:

- frustrating Western (UK and US) efforts to ‘sabotage’ the conference;
- influencing the position of the newly independent ‘Third World’ in the Cold War by delegitimising US-sponsored collective defence pacts and laying the foundation of the global Non-Aligned Movement (NAM);
- reshaping intra-Asian relations, especially by diminishing the influence of both India and China and paving the way for the emergence of a regionalism led by the weaker states of South-East Asia, as a precursor to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its ‘centrality’ in Asia’s regional architecture;
- strengthening the emerging global normative framework by not only advancing decolonisation, but also affirming universal human rights, support for universalism and the United Nations (UN);
- affirming the comity of civilisations over the ‘clash of civilisations’; and
- negative legacies, such as aggravating the polarisation of Asia, and by encouraging the authoritarian tendencies and regional interventionist impulses of key participants.

Frustrating Western hostility

The first legacy of the Bandung conference is, to put it bluntly, a thrilling story of Western paranoia, conspiracy, sabotage and ultimate frustration. With the declassification of diplomatic sources in recent years, it now seems unquestionable that the Western powers—especially the UK and the USA—felt a great deal of apprehension, and even threat, with regard to the Bandung conference. The UK was fearful that the conference would further stoke anti-colonial sentiments in its remaining possessions in Asia, Africa and elsewhere, which, although diminishing, were still substantial. The USA, for its part, was deeply anxious that the conference could dent the isolation of communist China and give it and the Soviet Union a major platform to increase communist influence in Asia and Africa. The British initially wanted to persuade pro-Western countries to boycott the conference, but then realised that this would be difficult and counterproductive. Hence, the British Cabinet ‘decided not to encourage foreign governments to attend, to discourage Gold Coast and Central African Federation from accepting their invitations for full participation, and generally to play down [the] importance of [the] conference’ (Marnham 1955).

Eventually, the British succeeded in preventing the leaders of Singapore (David Marshall) and Gold Coast (Kwame Nkrumah), both under dominion status, from attending the conference. Moreover, the British, in coordination with the USA and France, sought to manipulate the conference through friendly governments in attendance, especially

Turkey, Pakistan, the Philippines, Iran, Iraq and Thailand (Cable, UK Foreign Office, and Far Eastern Department 1955). The British goal was to prevent the emergence of an Afro-Asian bloc; to prevent any resolution 'advantageous to the communists or inimical to British interests'; and to 'cause the maximum embarrassment to the communists' (ibid.). This approach was developed at two meetings held on March 2 and 3, 1955, in the UK Foreign Office (ibid.). British 'guidance' documents—dealing with the existence of 'communist colonialism'; the need for a ban on strategic goods exports to communist China; communist violation of the Geneva Agreements on Indo-China; the dangers of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence (promoted by India and China); the lack of religious freedom in the communist world; and the hydrogen bomb (the goal being to discourage any resolution against the bomb with its risk of massive radiation)—were sent to British diplomatic missions in 37 countries, including some countries not attending the conference. Through these documents, the British missions were also asked to urge friendly nations to 'resist proposals that the Conference should endorse controversial claims for extensions of sovereignty', and to offer advice to 'our more trustworthy friends [who] should be warned to beware of projects for any kind of Afro-Asian bloc designed to disrupt existing regional organisations (Colombo Plan, specialised agencies of UN, SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization], etc.)' ('Draft Guidance Telegram' 1955). Yet, as will be discussed later, at Bandung sovereignty was interpreted to cover non-participation in Cold War pacts, and SEATO was delegitimised. At the same time, no guidance was issued on the issue of racialism, even though some British officials were anxious to portray Bandung as a racialist gathering—due to the exclusion of countries like Rhodesia and the apartheid regime in South Africa—because it was an issue on which the West was vulnerable.

For its part, the Eisenhower administration also advised US missions 'to avoid an open show of interest' in the conference (Makins 1955). While the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles publicly told the media that the 'US had always taken a sympathetic attitude' and Bandung would 'serve a useful purpose', and that the US attitude towards the conference would be one of 'benevolent indifference' (*Washington Post*, May 6, 1955), the USA was deeply worried that the conference would 'offer communist China an excellent propaganda opportunity' and 'enhance communist prestige in the area and weaken that of the West' (British Embassy, Tokyo 1955). The USA further worried that the conference might 'lull the anxieties of friendly and non-committed countries and place the blame for present world tensions on the policies of the United States' (Makins 1955).

In order to counter this, the USA urged collaboration among its friends to oppose the neutrals and China. The Americans followed the British lead in offering friendly governments—such as Japan, Turkey, South Vietnam, Lebanon, the Philippines and Thailand—advice and guidance on how to behave and what to say. The USA not only had an advance copy of the Philippine lead representative Carlos Romulo's opening speech at Bandung, but also gave him (less than two weeks before the conference) a draft resolution on Taiwan, which he promised to (and did) use at Bandung (US Department of State 1955a).

These Western efforts at manipulation initially had the effect of fuelling controversy and bickering, which at one point threatened to derail the whole conference. For example, the British had provided an aide-memoire to the Ceylonese prime minister, John Kotelawala, one of the sponsors of the conference, urging that 'full attention

should be directed to communist colonialism' as in Eastern Europe under Soviet dominance. Kotelawala was supposedly in the so-called 'neutralist' camp, but actually sympathised with pro-Western positions, albeit within the limits imposed by his fear of Indian disapproval. After he launched into an attack on communist colonialism at Bandung, a British official mused: 'Sir John Kotelawala made good use of his brief' (Crombie 1955). But his attack not only angered the Chinese premier, Chou En-lai, causing him to lose his cool for the only time during the entire conference, but also the Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who rejected the parallel between Western colonialism and the situation in the Soviet bloc countries in Eastern Europe, and confronted him angrily. Kotelawala subsequently toned down his position on communism considerably.

Despite such incidents, the conference was able to reach consensus on almost all major issues, and produced a Final Communiqué. To a large extent, the Western effort at manipulation was born out of exaggerated fear of the intentions of the Bandung countries, especially the neutralist camp led by India and Indonesia. The latter were not really pursuing any anti-Western (and certainly not a pro-Soviet) agenda, but in some cases the collective interests of the newly independent countries, such as advancing decolonisation or developing an independent common voice in international affairs, seemed anti-Western to the leading Western powers (the USA, the UK and France). There was no downplaying of the opposition to Western colonialism (relative to communist colonialism) at Bandung. And the Anglo-American effort to cause 'maximum embarrassment' to China was an outstanding failure. So was the Western effort to prevent the emergence of an independent collective voice and movement of the post-colonial states, although this might not have been apparent in the immediate aftermath of Bandung. Despite differences and divisions among the participants, the Bandung conference provided the first major instance of the post-colonial countries' collective resistance to Western dominance in IR.

Influencing Cold War dynamics

A second legacy, and closely related to the above, of the Bandung conference lies in shaping the attitudes of newly independent countries towards the Cold War by laying the foundation of the NAM. Contrary to popular myth, neither Tito of Yugoslavia nor Nkrumah of Gold Coast (Ghana) came to Bandung. With Nehru there, and Indonesia acting as the host, two of the main founders of the NAM were present. And the person who did come to Bandung and prove to be one of the most engaged and popular participants was Egypt's new leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was instrumental in negotiating compromises, without which the Final Communiqué would not have been possible. Before Bandung, Nasser had been described in secret US assessments as pro-Western. If that were the case, Nasser certainly left the conference a changed man. He heard Nehru's arguments against the dangers posed by the Cold War pacts being promoted by the US Secretary of State, Dulles, which reinforced Nasser's own misgivings about the Baghdad Pact and its offshoot, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). At Bandung, Nehru gave full vent to his bitter opposition to such pacts, especially SEATO. Speaking of the decision of some countries represented at Bandung—namely, Turkey, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines—Nehru (1955a, 109) lamented: 'It is an intolerable thought to me that the great countries of Asia and Africa should come out of bondage into freedom only to degrade themselves or humiliate themselves in this way'. As he saw it, membership in

such pacts rendered a country a 'camp follower' and deprived it of its 'freedom and dignity'. Nehru himself came under criticism for using such harsh words, and the conference compromised by listing among the 'Ten Principles' (*Dasa Sila*) of its Final Communiqué 'Respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations' (Principle 5), as well as the principle of 'abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers' (Principle 6a) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1955). But the latter—i.e. the abstention principle—became one of the founding declaratory principles of the NAM. Moreover, while the conference affirmed the right of collective self-defence, it had the effect of discouraging any further new members for SEATO, as had been hoped for by its supporters. In fact, SEATO was doomed. As a UK Foreign Office assessment of Bandung acknowledged: 'any hope that might have existed that additional states could be attracted to SEATO has now vanished, and a growing tendency towards a neutralist attitude in line with India's position is to be expected' (UK Foreign Office, Research Department 1955).

Moreover, although no direct link could be established from the available primary sources, Nasser's experience at the conference seemed to transform his policy. Within four months after returning from Bandung, Nasser signed a historic arms deal with Czechoslovakia and, less than a year thereafter, in July 1956, he nationalised the Suez Canal Company, thereby prompting the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion that would change the history of the Middle East and the course of the Cold War. Whether he actually solicited Soviet weapons during his meetings with Chou En-lai in Bandung—weapons which the Soviet Union eventually would provide through Czechoslovakia—is a matter of conjecture, but some analysts believe that it did happen (Sid-Ahmed 2005). According to an Egyptian political writer, during their meeting in Bandung, 'Chou-en-Lai (sic) promised Abdel-Nasser that he would speak to the Soviets to see if *they* could furnish weapons to Egypt. His mediation on Egypt's behalf led to the Czech arms deal' (Sid-Ahmed 2005). And Nasser would join Nehru and Tito as a leader of the NAM that emerged in the 1960s.

Another impact of the Bandung conference might have to do with the seeds of the Sino-Soviet rift. It was a rare multilateral conference which communist China attended without the Soviet Union being present. There is little evidence that China consulted the Soviet Union to discuss and develop a common stand. Bandung allowed China to show its independent face in international affairs, rather than as the representative of a monolithic communist bloc. As Jack (1955, 36) noted in a study of the conference: 'Bandung saw the emergence of China as a great Asian power and not merely as an isolated partner of Russia'.

Ultimately, the conference might have contributed to Chinese diplomatic independence from the Soviet Union. In fact, some Asian leaders, including Nehru, overcame initial opposition from some countries (Ceylon in particular) to invite China to the conference precisely on the grounds that it might draw China away from the communist bloc. China could develop its identity as an Asian nation seeking peaceful relations with its neighbours, rather than a communist nation promoting subversion and instability in the region. Kahin (1956, 36) noted in his study of Bandung that the conference was an opportunity for Chinese leaders to become more acquainted with the 'realities of China's international environment', and for its neighbours to create 'moral restraint against possible Chinese tendencies of aggression'.

Reshaping intra-Asian relations and regionalism

The third legacy of the Bandung conference was the rise of South-East Asian regionalism, minus India and China. This was the result of the diminished influence of Asia's two major powers—India and China—that Bandung brought about. This assertion may seem surprising to those who accept the conventional wisdom that the conference was a contest for influence between the Indian prime minister, Nehru, and his Chinese counterpart, Chou En-lai, which the latter won decisively. But the extent of any India–China competition at the time of the conference is quite exaggerated, as the Chinese genuinely respected Nehru and depended on his counsel in the lead-up to the conference and at the conference itself (UK High Commission, Ceylon 1955). A British diplomatic dispatch concerning the conference noted that: 'Chou had at one stage said that any English phrase which was acceptable to Nehru would be acceptable to him' (ibid.). Chinese documents collected by the author show that while the Chinese did recognise differences between their own and India's aims and objectives—especially over the creation of a permanent organisation out of Bandung, which China wanted but India rejected—there was more convergence than competition in the interests and approach of the two leaders.

As to who won the 'contest', the consensus among observers is that it was Chou. Nehru was seen to have been at least sidelined by Chou. He was criticised for his arrogant manner, while observers praised Chou's impressive—calm, mature, restrained and conciliatory—demeanour. Yet the reality may well be that neither won. While Bandung might have undercut Nehru's prestige and influence, it did not end suspicions of China, especially after China continued and stepped up its support for communist insurgencies in its neighbourhood. The Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, W. R. Crocker, who closely monitored the conference and its outcome, offers a more balanced assessment of the Nehru–Chou rivalry than most media reports of the time:

It is commonly said at Djakarta today that Chou's rise in prestige was proportionate to, and indeed the cause of, Nehru's decline in prestige. Some at least of this argument originates from identifiable sources, some of it is wishful, and some is exaggerated. It was, after all, Nehru who insisted on Chou's being invited, who indoctrinated him carefully before the Conference, and who sponsored him in the difficult opening days at Bandung. Mr. Nehru did not strike me as feeling that he had been supplanted by Chou. He might of course have been concealing his feelings but during the time I spent with him after the conference he spoke highly of Chou's performance and he seemed to be pleased with it (Crocker and Far Eastern Department 1955).

Yet one might argue, with the benefit of hindsight, that the real winner at Bandung was neither China nor India, but the future ASEAN. The suspicion of both India and China, the big powers of Asia, generated at Bandung paved the way for a regionalism of smaller nations to emerge in Asia—one that is led by none of the big powers. This was realised with the establishment of ASEAN in 1967. What is more, the Bandung conference gave Japan an opportunity to emerge from its isolation and passivity following its defeat in World War II. At Bandung, Japan focused almost exclusively on economic issues, and might have got some ideas and a taste of regionalism without the kind of hegemonic framework that had underpinned its concept of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. By paving the way for a regionalism of smaller nations, which Japan came to back strongly by later providing crucial economic support to ASEAN, the Bandung conference might

have decisively shaped the trajectory of Asian regionalism, which continues to this day to be ASEAN-centric. What is more, the informal, interpersonal and consensus-driven nature of the interactions among the top leaders at Bandung might have presaged the ‘ASEAN Way’—the non-coercive and non-legalistic mode of interactions that marked the formative years of ASEAN.

Challenging and broadening global norms

Fourth, while challenging Western dominance, the Bandung conference also contributed to and strengthened the emerging post-war global normative framework to better reflect the positions and concerns of the newly independent nations. Elsewhere, I have dealt extensively with how the conference contributed to the extension and deepening of the idea and norms of universal sovereignty (Acharya 2009, 2011). The meaning of non-intervention was extended to include non-participation in unequal military alliances conceived in the Cold War context. The dominant Western perspective today might view this contribution in a negative light, given its tendency to view sovereignty and non-intervention as a threat to both collective action and collective morality—especially the protection of human rights. But in the immediate post-war context, sovereignty was a deeply emancipatory idea for countries that had lost it to predatory and profoundly immoral Western powers for several centuries. However, the Bandung conference’s normative contribution also includes its staunch support for universal human rights—something often overlooked by Western governments, as well as human rights scholars and transnational activists. There is a persistent myth that the Bandung countries were, if not anti-human rights, at least cultural relativists. But there was no hint of cultural relativism in the discussions about human rights at Bandung. The very first of the Ten Principles called for ‘respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations’ (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1955). And it was not because of Western pressure. Nehru, who was no stooge of the West, himself took the lead by urging a dose of self-criticism at the outset of the debate over human rights. As he put it: ‘We have no right to criticize others for violating human rights if we ourselves do not observe them’ (Nehru 1955b). The Bandung Declaration ‘takes note of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations’. But it broadened its support for human rights by also recognising ‘the fundamental principles of human rights as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations’ (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1955). In this sense, the conference advanced the earlier efforts of the Latin American countries in promoting universal human rights and presaged the subsequent efforts of the developing countries in advancing the global human rights agenda at the UN (Reus-Smit 2013, 182–191).

The conference also strengthened support for the UN. Western nations had feared that the conference might undermine the UN and the principle of universalism by creating an alternative Afro-Asian bloc. Nine of the 29 participants at Bandung were not yet UN members. But the Bandung Declaration stated that ‘membership in the United Nations should be universal’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1955), and demanded that the UN Security Council admit those Bandung participants that were not yet members of the UN. In short, the conference defended universalism and sought its expansion, rather than suggesting any alternative to it.

A comity of civilisations

Finally, the Bandung conference offers one of the most vivid and powerful displays of the comity of civilisations—the investigation of which is a key concern of Global IR. Hosted by the world's largest Muslim country, whose motto is 'unity in diversity', the conference brought together leaders of diverse faiths. The leaders of the largest Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Confucian nations were present. Even among the Islamic nations, there were significant cultural differences—for example, between Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Yet, aside from adjusting the dates of the conference to avoid the Muslim fasting month, and despite Western-backed efforts to highlight the lack of religious diversity of communist societies, religion was a non-issue in shaping positions, alignments and interactions at the conference. One of the most powerful alliances was between Muslim Pakistan, secular-minded Turkey, Catholic Philippines and Buddhist Thailand. Religious tolerance was the dominant ethos, and the interactions among leaders at the conference were remarkably multicultural and interpersonal (including the sharing of food and common eating spaces for the leaders). The identity that mattered and shaped Bandung was the constructed political identity of the newly independent and marginalised forces of world politics, rather than the parochial identities of cultural or civilisational blocs. There was not even the faintest hint of a 'clash of civilisations' at Bandung.

Negative legacies

Some contemporary assessments tend to gloss over the negative legacies of the Bandung conference. But these did exist and must be recognised. A key negative legacy was the polarisation of Asia between pro-Western, communist and non-aligned countries. While these divisions had already become evident under the influence of the Cold War, Bandung helped to accentuate them considerably. Another negative legacy was that the conference might have contributed to authoritarianism in Asia and Africa. The pro-Western nations such as the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan, which claimed victory at Bandung for the 'free world', were blinded to their domestic failings, which resulted in military takeovers of their political systems. It is not unreasonable to assume that the euphoria generated by the success of the conference might have accentuated Sukarno's authoritarian impulses. It at least provided a diversion from his gathering domestic troubles. A further negative legacy was to encourage regional adventurism and interventionism by some of the larger participating nations. Egypt's Nasser returned from Bandung emboldened not only to take on the West, but also to assertively seek an Egyptian sphere of influence over his neighbours in the interest of pan-Arabism, including by carrying out military interventions in the region. And Sukarno's nationalistic foreign policy towards his neighbours—which led to a militant opposition (*Konfrontasi*) to the creation of Malaysia in 1963—could well have received a boost from the Bandung conference.

A Bandung balance sheet

Among its most conspicuous 'failures', it has been suggested that the conference did not develop any permanent organisation of Asian and African nations, as had been feared by the West and desired by some of the participants, especially China. But this had less to do

with Western manipulation as with Indian misgivings, as Nehru, learning from his earlier attempt at an Asian relations organisation, had by now realised the practical difficulties of creating a permanent organisation. Perhaps he was already looking to the future, when a larger and more global movement of post-colonial nations could be established (it was realised in the creation of the NAM in 1961). Some Western analysts noted that the condemnation of colonialism and the expression of anti-Western sentiments at the conference was muted. While this may be seen as a victory for the Western governments—especially the UK—the fact was that the leading participants, such as India and China, had no intention of turning the conference into an anti-Western talkfest. The Bandung conference advanced decolonisation. Aside from laying the foundations of the NAM, it directly inspired Nasser's pan-Arabism and Nkrumah's pan-African movement, the latter having a pronounced anti-colonial function, since Africa had lagged behind Asia on that score. As Kahin (1955) noted, the conference proved to be a 'substantial denominator of anti-colonialism'.

Indeed, one way to assess these overall implications of the conference would be to take a look at the confidential assessments of those very Western nations that had both feared its results and disparaged its significance in mobilising an Afro-Asian consensus. This may be more credible, given that assessments by the conference's main supporters—such as China, Indonesia and India—are likely to be perceived as biased in highlighting its successes. Despite their initial hostility and misgivings about the purpose and likely outcome of the conference, the Western powers had to accept, however grudgingly, its significance. In a patronising tone, a British assessment noted:

The East is no longer age-old, inscrutable, unchanging. It is young, eager, drunk with new nationalism and freedom, but also desperately anxious to behave with maturity and make a good showing before its elders if not betters. It loses its angularity only when treated as a grown-up and an equal, and like all adolescents is easily offended, and as easily influenced for good (R. W. Parkes, quoted in Morlan 1955).

In a less comical tone, an intelligence assessment by the US Department of State noted:

In fact, the nations assembled at Bandung, with little prior experience in running large international conferences and with only decades or less of independent participation in world politics, managed to organize a meeting which rejected the discipline of any of the Conference's five sponsoring powers, yet found its way to common ground with efficiency and dispatch. The Conference succeeded in demonstrating that there is an Asian-African consensus (US Department of State 1955b).

A British document further conceded that the conference 'strengthened the self-confidence' of the participating nations, 'gave them a greater sense of their importance in [the] world's affairs', and encouraged them to 'evolve policies of their own'. It further noted that an Afro-Asian 'common purpose' had been 'strengthened', leading to a corresponding 'weakening of Western leadership' (UK Foreign Office, Research Department 1955).

Although questions such as who won, who lost and whether the Bandung conference was a success or failure may never be settled, at the very least it produced 'the evident feeling of the delegations that the meeting represented a fresh stage in international relations', as the British assessment of the conference put it (R. W. Parkes, quoted in Morlan 1955). It underscored the real and substantial 'agency' of the non-Western

nations in the construction of the post-war international order in areas such as anti-colonialism, universalism and human rights. It marked the rise of the regionalism of the weak in world politics. It also had an 'educational function': 'a fuller and more realistic understanding of one another's point of view' (Kahin 1955, 35). It is more useful to view the Bandung legacies not in terms of successes and failure, but in terms of how the conference shaped and reshaped international order in Asia and the world, the analysis of which has been dominated by the centrality of great-power geopolitics to the neglect of the perspectives and agency of non-Western, non-great-power actors.

Implications for Global IR

The Bandung conference offers a unique and important point of reference for advancing the study of Global IR. The conference was not an event of some deep antiquity, but is still of immense significance in the *longue durée* conception of IR, as Sukarno's reference in his opening address to it being the 'first intercontinental' gathering of 'coloured peoples' clearly reminds us. What Sukarno (1955) said next is no less important: 'It is a new departure in the history of the world that leaders of Asian and African peoples can meet together in their own countries to discuss and deliberate upon matters of common concern'. Bandung was the first time that the nations of different continents were holding a multi-lateral intergovernmental meeting on their home turf, instead of in the imperial capitals of London, Paris, Brussels or Berlin. And their purpose was to advance not just decolonisation, which was already well under way (except in Africa), but also, as the secretary general of the Bandung conference, Roselan Abdulghani (1964, 103), later wrote, 'the formulation and establishment of certain norms for the conduct of present-day international relations and the instruments for the practical application of these norms'. The fact that they did so more in the former, or normative, sense, with the articulation of the Ten Principles, rather than in the latter, or practical, manner, and that there would remain gaps between the principles and how they were applied, does not detract from this contribution. While the international system they were born into was European in its origin, it would be misleading to simply call it, in the manner of the early English School theorists, the European states system writ large (Bull and Watson 1984). The new actors had to adapt those European rules to fit local post-colonial realities. At Bandung, they did so by broadening the meaning of non-intervention, seeking control over natural resources and delegitimising regional cooperation under the orbit of the great powers in the manner of the Concert of Europe. Later, the NAM, which was presaged at Bandung, and developing countries through their networking would advance these and other principles, including human rights.

The Bandung conference aspired to contribute to an international order that recognises some indigenous, non-Western forms of interaction (Acharya 2009). It decided against adopting any elaborate or formal rules of procedure, preferring to keep things informal, and rejected voting so that decisions were to be reached by deliberations and consensus. Abdulghani (1964, 29), the Indonesian secretary general of the conference, characterised these rules as the 'deep-rooted and unquestioned practice' of Indonesian, Asian and African societies. 'The object is to reach an acceptable consensus of opinion, and one which not only hurts the feeling or the position of no one, but which actually tends to reinforce the community feeling' (ibid.).

The Bandung conference's extension of universal sovereignty and its realisation of a substantial Afro-Asian consensus (as acknowledged by its Western detractors) on issues such as decolonisation and human rights (as well as other issues not discussed in this article due to lack of space, such as development, disarmament and self-determination) constitute a powerful act of agency by the non-Western countries. Agency here means something quite different from the sense employed by the Europeans under their 'standard of civilisation' formula—which in essence was based on an ability to play the game of power politics. The agency at display at Bandung was a normative agency—i.e. an ability to interpret, localise, formulate and strengthen the rules of international order to advance freedom, peace and order. While some of these rules were not always upheld in practice, and gaps developed between these normative aspirations and subsequent realities in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, this does not detract from the fact that they remain integral to the contemporary global normative order supported by the majority of both developed and developing countries.

The Bandung conference also sheds light on the nature and implications of the current global power shift. Many of the emerging powers of today have a strong connection with Bandung. Seven of the members of the G20, the premier global forum that brings together both emerging and established powers, attended Bandung: China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Japan (South Africa, which, along with India and China, belongs to BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—should also be added, as delegates from the African National Congress attended as observers). While there were differences at Bandung, there was also a substantial measure of consensus among the participants about the need to reform the existing global order to make it more just and democratic. The same demand underpins the policies of the contemporary emerging powers, and hence must count as a legacy of the Bandung conference. Indeed, the ideological gap between then pro-Western Turkey, on the one hand, and India and China, on the other, has narrowed. While the West hopes that these powers may somehow be co-opted into the existing international order without it having to make significant concessions, these hopes are likely to prove illusory. The normative aspirations of the emerging powers are more consistent with the Bandung Declaration, with its quest for greater justice and equality among nations, than the past great-power initiatives, be it the Congress of Vienna, which marginalised weaker states by creating the Concert of Europe, or the Berlin Conference, which carved up Africa.

The Bandung conference also underscores the importance of regions and interactions within and between regions—another core element of Global IR. It was not a global conference, nor was it strictly regional. It was an inter-regional endeavour comprising representatives of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, well before the European Union developed its own policy of inter-regionalism. Bandung demonstrated the contrived and constructed nature of regions—a subject of considerable importance in contemporary studies of comparative regionalism, a key foundation of Global IR. At Bandung, there was no separation between South-East Asia and South Asia, as the five sponsors—the Conference of South-East Asian Prime Ministers—included Pakistan, Ceylon and India, which are now part of South Asia. Similarly, there was no conception of the 'Middle East'—an imperial British concoction. The very fact that the conference was called the Asian-African Conference signifies that the Arab countries—Iran and Turkey—were simply regarded as part of Asia, with Egypt straddling Asia and Africa.

The study of the Bandung conference also provides an excellent example of how the area studies tradition can mesh with the discipline of IR to enrich both and create the foundation of a Global IR. The first major study of Bandung was produced by Kahin (1956), who was mainly from an area studies tradition. Subsequently, however, Bandung has been analysed from IR theoretical standpoints, especially critical, post-colonial and social constructivist perspectives. These perspectives add richness and sophistication to the analysis of the conference, and expand its message and relevance well beyond the South-East Asian or Asian studies community. The area studies tradition can only benefit from this expanded coverage of and attention to an event that occurred at the heart of South-East Asia, much as the study of ASEAN—which has a normative link with the Bandung conference—is proving to be an enriching meeting point for both area specialists and Global IR theorists.

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