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BANDUNG IN PERSPECTIVE

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An attempt to evaluate the importance of the conference of twenty-nine Asian and African nations held in April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, appears to be singularly difficult, despite the passage of an eventful year. That colorful affair which for a week caught the attention and kindled the imagination of the international public continues to be adorned with deep and hidden meanings which seem to vanish as one moves closer to the available record.

On the spot an infectious atmosphere of intensive interest and enthusiastic expectations prevailed among the hundreds of delegates and correspondents taxing Bandung's modest but efficiently utilized facilities. It is perhaps not surprising that in the age of nationalism the very fact that a gathering of resurgent peoples was held aroused emotions of revivalist intensity. As for policy decisions determined by the conference those familiar with its records which unfortunately have not been published until now, and aware of such disclosures as have become available concerning private consultations and negotiations

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\*These notes represent another interim report on the Asian-African Conference on which I hope to write a lengthier study next summer.

made possible by the conference are hard put to think of any major developments which could be specifically traced back to Bandung. What then were the objectives of its sponsors and participants? What was achieved?

It has been argued that in suggesting an Asian-African Conference at a meeting in Colombo late in April 1954, the Indonesian Prime Minister, Dr. Ali Sastroamidjojo, was primarily seeking international and domestic prestige for his cabinet with an eye on his country's forthcoming first general election. This somewhat unkind thesis was promoted at the time by opposition circles in Djakarta. It has since been turned, not without some poetic justice, by Sastroamidjojo's supporters against his erstwhile critics. When the latter, now controlling the government, suggested in December 1955 that preparations should be started for a second Asian-African Conference, the "Indonesian Observer" commented editorially that the attitude in New Delhi, Karachi and Rangoon was "rather lukewarm" and explained that "the lack of enthusiasm in those quarters may be ascribed to the fact that the present caretaker government in Indonesia may use this conference for political purposes at home."<sup>1/</sup>

If "the first intercontinental conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind"<sup>2/</sup> had only such rather simple motivations, it certainly became a major success--in public relations. Hundreds of important personalities sampled Indonesian hospitality, were impressed by the efficient way in which the conference had been organized and took along favorably modified views about a country which had received

rather gloomy treatment in the world's newspapers in recent years.

But however benevolent toward Indonesia, which they had supported morally during its struggle for independence, the other sponsors of the conference: Burma, Ceylon, India and Pakistan, must have expected other benefits from it. The general assumption has been that the envisaged purposes were rather diffuse. They wanted to have a social gathering at which leaders of ministerial rank could get acquainted with one another's point of view. There was precedent for this. Eight years earlier, in March-April 1947, Mr. Nehru had sponsored in New Delhi the first Asian Relations Conference. Although officially non-governmental, representatives of governments had attended as observers. A second conference was to be held in 1949 in China but the future had in store the tragedies following partition in India, civil war in China, colonial wars in Indonesia and Indochina, instability almost everywhere. The time had come perhaps--following the Geneva Conference of 1954--to mark ceremonially the beginning of a new age in Asia and Africa. In this sense too the conference was successful. It will be remembered as a landmark of a new age.

The closer one moves toward assuming more specific motivations the more difficult it gets to see a coherent pattern. No concrete agenda had been announced in advance and fundamental changes were made at the last possible moment, such as deleting proposals for discussion of industrial and military implications of nuclear energy. It was not a trouble-shooting party. If one assumes as an alternative the desire to

facilitate general consultation between participants, the question arises as to why initially only members of the United Nations were to be invited.<sup>3/</sup> Their representatives had annual opportunities to exchange views during sessions of the General Assembly. Such consultations had become customary following the instructions of the New Delhi Conference on Indonesia of January 1949.<sup>4/</sup>

Alternatively, it has been suggested that the calling of the conference was meant as a protest against the failure of the Western powers to consult with Asian and African states.<sup>5/</sup> But, the growth of conference diplomacy in the United Nations gave Asians and Africans ample opportunities to be heard. Their influence on decisions outside the United Nations was far from negligible. The sponsors of the Bandung Conference prided themselves with the fact that their suggestions concerning Indochina formulated at Colombo in April 1954, were clearly reflected in the decisions adopted by the Geneva Conference three months later.

Western jitters notwithstanding, no attempt was made to create an antagonistic bloc, pitted against the white race, "capitalist exploiters," or even colonial powers in general. The invitation launched in December 1954 from Bogor stated explicitly that the sponsors did not decide that the participating countries should build themselves into a regional bloc. The assurance was repeated throughout the conference. The only recommendations included in the Final Communique concerning prior consultation of participating countries in international forums--with a view to furthering their mutual economic interest--stated firmly that "it is,

however, not intended to form a regional bloc."

An intriguing hypothesis has been recently presented by Professor George Kahin of Cornell University. On the strength of discussions with some of the central figures of the conference he asserts that the basic motivations and expectations of the five sponsors concerned China. According to Kahin, they sought: (1) avoidance of war with the United States; (2) development of China's diplomatic independence of Soviet Russia; (3) containment of Chinese and Vietminh military power and political influence at the southern border of China and the eastern boundaries of Cambodia and Laos, and the combatting of illegal and subversive Communist activities in all non-Communist Asia, particularly in their own countries.<sup>6/</sup>

If true, this hypothesis casts interesting light on the subtle manipulations of Indian diplomacy. The idea to put Communist China on its mettle with all Asian and African states as witnesses must have developed between the first Indian-Chinese formulation of the five principles of coexistence in April 1954 and December 1954 when Nehru proposed at Bogor that Communist China be invited. India's intentions were carefully dissimulated. While it was obvious at Bandung that India's representatives acted as if they were introducing the Chinese Communists to Asian society, nothing recorded there indicates awareness of the subtler aspects of this ingenious Indian plot. Correspondents present did not play it up and there was no talk about it in the lobbies. It is difficult to avoid altogether the feeling that this explanation

represents a brilliant Indian afterthought.

Dr. Ali Sastroamidjojo told the Indonesian Parliament in June 1955 that as President of the Conference with the purpose of bringing about a conciliatory atmosphere he was guided by the rule that no controversial matters which would bring disagreement should be discussed.<sup>7/</sup> It is difficult to see how such conduct of affairs, which according to Sastroamidjojo was approved by the other delegations, was compatible with the purposes ascribed to the conference by Professor Kahin. In the Indonesian Prime Minister's assessment before Parliament of the important results of the conference there is no hint that assuaging China was one of them. It is, of course, perfectly possible that the "neutralist" powers speak least, in public, about what they fear most.

While specific explanations, assuming subtle diplomatic scheming, seem less convincing than simpler and more shallow ones concerning the motivations and expectations of the sponsors of the Bandung Conference, there are other dimensions to be considered in appraising the importance of this event. The conference did not limit its activity to delineating an area of consensus concerning principles but concerned itself formally and made specific suggestions on a number of international issues, while other issues were discussed informally and some were avoided altogether.

If one compares what political and security questions preoccupied the ninth and tenth sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations and what issues were discussed at Bandung, the major difference

appears to be the avoidance of formal consideration by the Asian-African Conference of all questions involving directly Communist China.

The sequence of diplomatic efforts culminating at Bandung in Chou En-lai's statement that the Chinese Government is willing to sit down and enter into negotiations with the United States Government is well-known and need not be pursued here. Officially the conference ignored the issue. Did it contribute informally to its solution? Whether conversations in Bandung with representatives of twenty-nine Asian and African leaders made a greater impact on Communist China-- assuming that the disposition of its rulers was previously warlike-- than the constant flow of conversations through normal diplomatic channels remains an open question. By March 1956 seven months of Chinese-American ambassadorial talks in Geneva seemed to have resulted in a stalemate<sup>8/</sup> and the first anniversary of the Bandung Conference may well be marked by greater tension than a year ago in the area of Formosa.

The Korean question was completely ignored at Bandung. Without any explanations given, the two Korean governments were not invited, in striking contrast with the inclusion of delegations from North and South Vietnam. While the Korean question was avoided, the Joint Secretariat of the conference had prepared a background paper on Indochina and Prime Minister Nehru suggested at the closed meetings of the Political Committee the discussion of this problem. The topic was dropped for harmony's sake after heated exchanges between the delegates of North and South Vietnam. The Asian-African Conference avoided also to take a



stand on China's representation in the United Nations. Altogether a modest record on major Asian problems.

Looking now at those problems which were discussed at Bandung and then taken up at the tenth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations the following picture emerges:

The question of French rule in North Africa had brought to Bandung an active and dedicated group of Arab nationalists from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, sponsored and supported by the Arab delegations. The conference urged the French government to bring about without delay a peaceful settlement in North Africa. At the tenth session of the General Assembly the Moroccan item was placed again on the agenda, as it had been since 1952, but was shelved eventually with an expression of confidence that France and Morocco would find a satisfactory solution through negotiation. The Tunisian question had been disposed of in similar fashion in 1954.

Much more serious was the impact of the introduction by fourteen Asian and African nations of the question of Algeria. Overruling for the first time in its history its own Steering Committee on an issue of such importance, the General Assembly voted twenty-eight to twenty-seven to debate the situation in Algeria, whereas in 1954 a similar ruling of the Steering Committee had not been challenged. On September 30 France withdrew its delegation from the General Assembly and postponed indefinitely the visit to Moscow of her Premier and Foreign Minister, planned for mid-October, because of the Soviet

Union's vote against France. It was charged in Paris that the vote in the General Assembly--in disregard of the fact that Algeria is constitutionally part of Metropolitan France, not a dependent territory--reflected a kind of alliance on a grand scale between Communism and Arab and Asian nationalism which allegedly had grown out of the Bandung Conference. France shunned the General Assembly until November 25, when through the unanimous adoption of a resolution introduced by India, the General Assembly decided that it was no longer seized of the question of Algeria. Looking at the tenth session as a whole, the Asian-African nations had not contributed substantially to the solution of the Algerian question, but had raised serious doubts about the efficacy of the constitutional restraints incorporated in the United Nations Charter and about the opportunity of Charter revision in the foreseeable future.

The Asian-African nations were also concerned with the problem of racial discrimination. The question of the treatment of people of Indian origin in the Union of South Africa had been on the agenda of the General Assembly since the first session in 1946, without making progress in settling the dispute involving India, Pakistan and the Union of South Africa. The policies of apartheid were under scrutiny by the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa. The General Assembly's competence to deal with either question had been challenged by the representative of the Union of South Africa under Article 2, paragraph 7. At Bandung representatives

of the African National Congress and of the South African Indian Congress urged the delegates to use their good offices to prevail upon other nations to persuade the Union of South Africa to abandon their policy of apartheid and racial discrimination. The conference limited itself to a strongly-worded condemnation of racial segregation and discrimination. At the General Assembly, in November 1955, a committee decision to extend the life of the three-man Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa prompted the latter country to leave the General Assembly, although a month later the resolution failed to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority and thus the Commission was discontinued. India, Pakistan and the Union of South Africa were invited to report to the next session of the General Assembly on their negotiations. The outcome of the debate was regarded as a setback for the anti-colonial powers.<sup>2/</sup>

The question of West New Guinea was also discussed at Bandung. It had been brought before the General Assembly in 1954 by Indonesia. A resolution expressing hope that Indonesia and the Netherlands would endeavour to find a solution to their dispute in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter failed to obtain a two-thirds majority at the ninth session of the General Assembly. At Bandung, the Netherlands Government had been urged to reopen negotiations as soon as possible. Earnest hope was expressed that the United Nations would assist the parties concerned in finding a peaceful solution to the dispute. At the tenth session of the General Assembly the question of

West New Guinea was submitted for inclusion on the agenda by fifteen delegations (all member states present at Bandung except Ethiopia and Turkey). The question was placed on the agenda but not debated, following the Indonesian government's decision to pursue bilateral negotiations with the Netherlands. With the failure of these negotiations in February, after the General Assembly had adjourned, no progress had been made on the question of West New Guinea in the year following the Bandung Conference.

The Asian-African nations were also concerned with the existing tension in the Middle East, caused by the situation in Palestine. The conference declared its support of the rights of the Arab people of Palestine and called for the implementation of the United Nations Resolution on Palestine and the achievement of the peaceful settlement of the Palestine question. But it would be difficult to argue that the Asian-African nations advanced the cause of peaceful settlement in the winter of 1955-1956. The Security Council's strong and unanimous condemnation on January 19, 1956 of Israel's Lake Tiberias attack against Syria on December 11, 1955 was based on a resolution submitted jointly by France, the United Kingdom and the United States, not by the Bandung conferees. Whether tension--increasing developments--such as Egyptian Premier Nasser's letter, dated December 15, 1955, to the Secretary General of the United Nations, threatening the use of armed force against Israel--can be related to the Bandung Conference, will be examined below.

The most constructive achievement of the tenth session of the General Assembly--assuming that universal membership in the United Nations is desirable--was the admission of sixteen new members on December 14, 1955. On this question the appeal of the Bandung Conference to the Security Council may have contributed to breaking the impasse which had prevented admission of new members since the election of Indonesia in 1950. When a "package" proposal was first introduced by Canada on behalf of twenty-nine delegations on December 1st statements made at Bandung were quoted as evidence of steady increase in support for the universality of the United Nations. The Asian-African nations were also partly successful in achieving representation on the Security Council. At Bandung they had expressed the view that they should be enabled to serve as non-permanent members on the Security Council from which they were precluded by the arrangement made in 1946 in London concerning the distribution of seats. With the support of the United States and of Latin American countries they were able to prevent through thirty-five ballots the election of Yugoslavia supported by Western Europe and by the Soviet bloc. The thirty-sixth ballot elected Yugoslavia with the required two-thirds majority with the understanding that it will resign next year to be replaced by the Philippines. During the next two years it will probably be attempted to enlarge the Security Council so as to permit equitable geographical representation of both Eastern Europe and the Asian-African countries.

In assessing the achievements of the Bandung Conference one must

also consider the grievances expressed and the arrangements publicly or privately worked out by Asian and African nations in April 1955 on matters with which the United Nations has not concerned itself. Most strongly under attack were Communist subversive activities and Western-sponsored military alliances. The Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation urged "abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country" and "abstention from the use of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers."

Discussions in closed session left no doubt that the first of these two principles was directed primarily against the activities of the international communist movement, through channels such as the Cominform or the World Federation of Trade Unions. The second principle was interpreted by a substantial minority as a condemnation of SEATO and of the Baghdad Pact.<sup>10/</sup>

There is no way of estimating with any degree of accuracy the rest of the world's responsiveness to these appeals coming from Bandung, but on balance Soviet leadership seems to have been more responsive to Asian and African opinion than Western leadership. Whether hypocritically or expressing profound transformation of the Soviet system, Nikita S. Khrushchev's report to the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, on February 14, 1956, advocated "peaceful coexistence" and ruled out interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Asian and African governments who have the will to believe in the "five principles"

of peaceful coexistence as a protection against Communist subversion will derive considerable comfort in Khrushchev's by now famous statement: "It is quite likely that the forms of the transition to socialism will become more and variegated. Moreover, it is not obligatory for the implementation of those forms to be connected with civil war in all circumstances."<sup>11/</sup>

Without fanfare though firmly Prime Minister Nehru had stated at Bandung that "if there is to be peaceful coexistence, if we are to adopt the principle of non-interference to each other, then any interference whether it is Communist or anti-Communist must stop, and each country should develop according to its own notions." After Khrushchev's speech, Nehru told India's Parliament that "it is an important matter not only for the Soviet Union but for other countries in the world at large to understand the swift, great changes that are taking place there. These changes are taking the Soviet Union more and more toward some kind of normalcy, which is to be welcomed in every way."<sup>12/</sup> Although imaginative developments in Western policy may be in the making at this very moment, until now the Asian and African nations have probably found the West less sensitive to their wishes. According to British sources, Asian reaction to the SEATO war games held in Thailand in February has not been favorable.<sup>13/</sup> The contrast with the peace talk coming from Moscow during the same week is unlikely to have been missed in Asia and Africa and the SEATO Communiqué after the meeting in March in Karachi did little to dispell neutralist fears.

In the Middle East decisions toward establishing a permanent military organization binding the members of the Baghdad Pact were announced in November 1955.<sup>14/</sup> What purports to be the "spirit of Bandung" found somewhat unexpected expression in President Tito's statement, following talks in Cairo with Premier Nasser, that the Baghdad Pact did not "serve the interests" of the people in the Middle East<sup>15/</sup> --an obvious reference to the principle written into the Final Communique of the Bandung Conference.

The West may counter that not its system of alliances but the consequences of the Bandung Conference increased tensions in the Middle East. Following their irate walkout from the General Assembly in September 1955, the French pointed to the sale of arms to Egypt by Czechoslovakia as proof that a kind of alliance on a grand scale between Communism and Arab and Asian nationalism had grown out of Bandung.<sup>16/</sup> Secretary Dulles told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February that during the past six months substantial amounts of Soviet bloc arms have been sent to the Middle East and that "the Soviet bloc has thus complicated the problem which the United Nations has sought to solve."<sup>17/</sup> It is unlikely that the sponsors of the Bandung Conference will feel that their gathering contributed to the mounting tensions in the Middle East or to Arab leaning toward Communism. Despite conspicuous courting by Chou En-lai a year ago, Nasser's government is still recognizing the Chinese government on Formosa not the one in Peking. The arms deal with the Soviet bloc had been in the making for a long



time. Unwilling to enter into formal defense arrangements with the West, the Egyptian government had concluded trade agreements providing for the exchange of cotton against Soviet armament in August 1953 or even earlier.<sup>18/</sup> Bandung may not have alleviated tensions in the Middle East but the situation could hardly be worse had the Asian-African Conference not taken place.

Current tensions in the Middle East--where an alignment under Egyptian leadership and financed by Saudi Arabian oil royalties seems to be increasingly pitted against the Baghdad Pact--provide convincing evidence that no monolithic bloc was in the making at Bandung. Farther from the surface but potentially of momentous importance in the long run are the problems created in Southeast Asia by the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of Western empires. Historically an area for cultural and demographic expansion for both China and India, Southeast Asia may become in the future the arena in which the two most populous nations on earth would contend for Lebensraum. The wobbly governments which have replaced the stronger armature of colonial rule are unlikely to fill the vacuum.

While there is room for scepticism concerning the origins of the Bandung Conference as part of an Indian master plan to contain China, evidence is accumulating that India was and is preoccupied by its future relations with China. In friendly talk with a group of American correspondents, the day after the Bandung Conference had adjourned, Nehru recalled that between the fifth and fourteenth centuries the

influence of India and China was strongly felt in Southeast Asia until Western expansion superceded both. He pointed out that in some areas such as Laos and Cambodia India was more influential, whereas China was more influential in other areas such as Vietnam.

On January 25, 1956, in an interview given to the Soviet newspaper Pravda in New Delhi, Nehru stated: "The Bandung Conference contributed primarily to the solution of problems connected with Indochina."<sup>19/</sup> It may well be that Professor Kahin's hypothesis while going too far in ascribing the origins of the Bandung Conference to Indian diplomatic maneuvers does not go far enough in tracing possible secret arrangements made during the period of intensive Asian and African diplomacy marked by the Geneva Conferences of 1954 and 1955, the Manila Conference of 1954 establishing SEATO, the Bandung Conference and the numerous official visits which have brought together these last two years Chinese and Russian Communist leaders and leaders of the uncommitted Asian and African countries.

Nehru's characterization of the Bandung Conference as an "experiment in coexistence" may represent more than a sentimental generality. While one group of countries may have tried after the signing of armistice agreements in Indochina to fill the power vacuum with the arrangements originating in the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty of September 8, 1954, India may have approached the same problem in a different way: a case can be made for the argument that an understanding was reached with China on what in past decades would have been called spheres of influence. The dividing line

may run vertically through the Indochinese peninsula,<sup>20/</sup> corresponding both to past areas of Indian or respectively Chinese cultural preponderance and to the political realities of the situation a year ago, when most observers doubted that the regime in South Vietnam had chances to survive. It would leave Cambodia and Laos on the Indian side, Vietnam on the Chinese side.

Various assurances given publicly and privately by Chou En-lai at Bandung may be the result of some such arrangement. The two Asian great powers may be united by common concern to keep Western influence out of Southeast Asia, but their interests are otherwise far from identical, possibly antagonistic. Unless one keeps this in mind it is difficult to understand the efforts made to avoid the impression that a bloc had been created. Nehru, who had supported plans for some permanent Asian organization at the time of the first Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, in 1947, as well as at the Conference on Indonesia, in 1949, stated in April 1955--on the day of his arrival in Bandung--that he was "not so very keen" on building a permanent body at the Asian-African Conference.<sup>21/</sup> A surprising declaration on the eve of meetings from which the uninitiated expected so much.

In the Final Communique it had been recommended "that the five sponsoring countries consider the convening of the next meeting of the conference." One of the sponsors, Premier U Niu proposed on November 1, 1955, in Moscow that the Soviet Union be invited to participate in future Asian-African conferences.<sup>22/</sup> Ten days later he withdrew the statement describing it as "a friendly talk on a festive occasion" and making it

clear that in his opinion the Soviet Union should not attend such conferences.<sup>23/</sup> Hesitation seemed to prevail among the Asian and African countries about the next move. Early in January 1956 it was reported that a second Asian-African conference scheduled for June 1956 in Cairo had been postponed indefinitely.<sup>24/</sup>

In the foreseeable future, the emergence of an Asian-African regional organization concerned with political and security questions is unlikely. Will the Asian and African nations use their position in the United Nations, in which they now control the largest bloc of votes, in attempting to create a new international order out of what Dag Hammarskjold has called "the great upheaval in the relationship of nations and peoples that is under way?"<sup>25/</sup> If so, then Bandung will have been, politically, only an episode.

### Footnotes

1. Antara Daily Newsbulletin, New York, December 22, 1955, p. 8.
2. Opening Speech of President Soekarno, April 18, 1955.
3. Cf. George McT. Kahin, The Asian-African Conference, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1956, p. 2.
4. Cf. Asia and Africa in the Modern World, Bombay-Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1955, p. 197.
5. Cf. Kahin, op. cit., p. 4.
6. Ibid., p. 5.
7. P.I.A. News Bulletin, Djakarta, June 15, 1955.
8. The New York Times, March 5, 1956.
9. Ibid., December 7, 1955.
10. Cf. Kahin, op. cit., p. 32.
11. The New York Times, February 15, 1956.
12. Ibid., February 24, 1956.
13. Ibid., February 29, 1956.
14. Ibid., November 23, 1955.
15. Ibid., January 8, 1956.
16. Ibid., October 4, 1955.
17. Ibid., February 25, 1956.
18. Ibid., August 11, 1953.
19. Neue Zürcher Zeitung, January 28, 1956.
20. Cf. Raymond Aron, "Le situation dans le Sud-Est Asiatique: de Bangkok à Bandoeng", Politique Étrangère, juillet 1955, p. 397.
21. Times of Indonesia, April 18, 1955.
22. The New York Times, November 2, 1955.
23. Antara Daily Newsbulletin, New York, November 15, 1955.

24. The New York Times, January 3, 1956.
25. United Nations, Annual Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization, 1 July 1954 - 1 July 1955, New York 1955, p. I.