

# *FROM BRUSSELS TO BOGOR: Contacts, Networks and the History of the Bandung Conference 1955*

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses the roots of the Bandung Conference of 1955 by tracing the alliance of Asian and African worldwide internationalism and anti-imperialism that existed since the early twentieth century. It attempts to show that although the conference emerged during the height of the Cold War, the network behind this alliance had gradually developed since the interwar period. The solidarity of this alliance lay in the common history of the colonized people that struggled to become sovereign. Contacts, meetings and conferences that took place in Europe and Asia juxtaposed the anti-imperialist movement of Asian and African countries. This article argues that the Bandung Conference 1955 was the culmination of relationships and connections of an Afro-Asian group who had been long oppressed by colonialism, racism and class superiority.

**Keywords:** the Bandung Conference, Asian-African solidarity, network, contact, conference, colonialism, imperialism.

## **Abstrak**

*Artikel ini mendiskusikan akar-akar kemunculan Konferensi Bandung 1955 dengan menelusuri aliansi internasionalis dunia dan anti-imperialis Asia dan Afrika yang telah ada sejak awal abad kedua puluh. Artikel ini berusaha untuk memperlihatkan bahwa meskipun konferensi ini muncul pada masa puncak Perang Dingin, jaringan dibalik aliansi ini telah sedikit demi sedikit berkembang sejak masa interwar. Solidaritas dari aliansi ini terletak pada kesamaan sejarah sebagai orang terjajah yang berjuang untuk menjadi berdaulat. Kontak-kontak, pertemuan-pertemuan dan konferensi-konferensi yang terjadi di Eropa dan Asia mendekatkan pergerakan anti-imperialis negara-negara Asia dan Afrika. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa Konferensi Bandung adalah kulminasi dari hubungan dan koneksi dari grup Afro-Asia yang telah lama ditindas oleh kolonialisme, rasisme dan superioritas kelas.*

**Kata kunci:** Konferensi Bandung, solidaritas Asia-Afrika, jaringan, kontak, konferensi, kolonialisme, imperialisme.

“If the Banteng (bull) of Indonesia can work together with the Sphinx of Egypt, with Nandi Ox of the country of India, with the Dragon of the country of China, with the champions of independence of other countries – if the Banteng of Indonesia can work together with all the enemies of international capitalism and imperialism around the world – O, surely the end of international imperialism is coming fairly soon!”

Sukarno, “Mentjapai Indonesia Merdeka”, 1933

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## INTRODUCTION

The notion of Afro-Asian solidarity reached its peak with the historic gathering of the Bandung Conference. Held on 18-24 April 1955, the Bandung Conference epitomized “the desire of the peoples of Asia and Africa, long separated by colonial rule, to become reacquainted with each other and to draw strength from a sense of solidarity in facing their common problems, both at home and in the international relations” (Anwar, 2008: 181). Described by President Sukarno of Indonesia as “the first intercontinental conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind” (Abdulgani, R., 1950-1976, ‘President Sukarno Speech at the Opening Ceremony of AA Conference on April 18, 1955’, 1955), this conference was a watershed in international and diplomatic history. It was the first ever meeting of the leaders of twenty-nine independent and nearly independent Asian and African countries. Nearly all of Asia was represented – Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and Yemen. Participants also included most of the independent and near independent countries of Africa – Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast, Liberia, Libya, and Sudan (Kahin, 1956: 1). The symbolism of such a meeting was very powerful at the time. It caught the imagination of many people across the world far beyond Asia and Africa.

The Bandung Conference was an opportunity for oppressed peoples of Asian and African countries to build trust and set up diplomatic networks. But, the conference more importantly set the stage for the postcolonial ambitions of the newly independent states of Asia and Africa to question the *status quo*, the injustice of the global order. This conference emerged as a key event in the Cold War, signifying the geopolitical predicaments for the postcolonial period created by the global imbalance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States (Lee, 2009: 82). Although the Bandung Conference emerged at the height of the Cold War in the mid-1950s, this article argues that the roots of this conference can

be found in the early twentieth century when European imperialism of the colonial world was criticized within the network of the worldwide internationalist and anti-imperialist movement. Bandung was the result of the long efforts of the global anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism network that gradually developed since the early twentieth century when many Asian and African countries were still in colonial form. It showed a coalition of the (post)colonial world with the intention to reconstruct an obsolete world into a novel world committed to self-determination, human rights and world peace. This article examines the historical roots of the Bandung Conference of 1955 from the colonial period to the postcolonial period in which the solidarity of Asian-African nations emerged and was formulated. It is based on qualitative research which draws on a large number of sources in archives and reports. It also explores secondary sources such as journals, books and newspapers to show the complexity of the formation of the Bandung Conference.

## THE BIRTH OF SOLIDARITY

Modern anti-Western discourse arose out of the legitimacy crisis of a single, Eurocentric global polity in the age of high imperialism (Aydin, 2007). Its genesis was closely related to the break in the non-Western elite’s perception of the west since the early 1880s. On a global scale, from the 1880s to 1914, this period saw the peak of European imperialist expansion in the world. However, on the other hand, it was also the time of the formation of alternative universalist visions in the non-Western world. The shift in global imperialism since the 1880s had paradoxical consequences for the colonies: it introduced and later developed an industrial capitalism, but, on the other hand, it led to new social groupings and political forces (Brown, 1963; Anderson, 2006; Brewer, 1980; Smith, 2003). The transformation of the economic, social and political geography in the colonial state inevitably stimulated the spread of urbanization and a gradual opening up of the professions and the bureaucracy to local people. A rapid growth of an indigenous middle class which acquired Western education and modern technology (Brown, 1963;

180; Anderson, 2006: 115-6). All of these provided a social basis for nationalist movements and other radical movements in the colonial states. According to Anderson (2006), the new-style global imperialism, based on industrial capitalism, was predisposed to the rise of nationalism and the idea of nation in the colonial world, especially in Asia and Africa (p. 139).

New ideas of nation flourished in the colonies inspired by European nationalism that artificially separated sovereign domains (potential nation-states) in which ethnicity, history, language as well as law, economy and government were to be set up in different ways. Since the 1880s, nationalism took a dramatic leap forward, and its ideological and political content was transformed (Hobsbawm, 1989: 142). National identification, as a basis of nationalism, became a political force and more widespread than ever before. It then formed a general substratum of politics. What nationalism ushered as the primary idea of the nineteenth century, according to Hobsbawm (1989), was “a major set of mutations within political nationalism that was to have profound consequences for the twentieth century” (p. 144). Its mutations were the assumption that national self-determination up to and including the formation of independent sovereign states applied to any groups that claimed to be a ‘nation’ and the tendency of these ideas could not be fulfilled by any form of autonomy less than full state independence (Hobsbawm, 1989: 144).

Multi-ethnic empires, such as the Habsburg and Russian Empires, encountered a serious dilemma with this new political force. The option taken by most empires was bifurcated by two preferences: whether to patronize or suppress these stirrings of nationalism. In North African and Asian polities, the dilemma of how to handle national aspiration was elevated by European dominance and local economic backwardness (Bayly, 2004: 213). Egypt, for instance, by the 1870s, had become a disputed land of commercial interests by the British and French. After 1878, the Western powers compelled the Egyptian rulers to reduce their army, increase taxation and appoint foreign advisers (Bayly, 2004: 215). The feeling of

discontent due to European intrusion and dissatisfaction with Ismail’s rule prompted the first Egyptian nationalist groupings in 1879. The growing sense of Egyptian solidarity alarmed both the British and French. To maintain their authority the Anglo-French military bombarded Alexandria at the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir in 1882.

From the 1880s to the 1890s it was seedtime for the emergence of a new solidarity based on national identification in Asia. In India, various organizations and intellectuals, assembled in the first Indian National Congress at Bombay in 1885, marking the beginning of Indian nationalism. The most the Congress wanted was that more Indians be admitted to the legislative councils (Johnson, 1973: 15). They proposed a recommendation to the need of reconstituting the legislative councils, reduction of military expenditure and simultaneous examination of the civil service, with a change in the age limit (Seal, 1968: 266). Despite the moderate path taken at its foundation, the Congress is believed to have inculcated the sense of national unity and is recognized as the main vehicle of early nationalism in India.

The awakening feeling of national identity also applied to the Philippines. Several *ilustrados* (enlightened) people, mostly from the growing middle class of natives who had studied at Spanish universities, came together in the metropole (Madrid), within an organization called Propaganda Movement. They discussed the role of excessive church and, later, on Spanish political domination (Anderson, 1998: 198). One of the distinguished members of that movement was Jose Rizal, a polymath and polyglot who wrote two remarkable books *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891). These novels triggered an imagination of a new historical person: ‘the Filipino’, and made him the symbol of Philippine resistance against two states: the autocratic, clerical-colonial state based in Manila and the half-liberal republican, half clerical-monarchical imperial state based in Madrid (Anderson, 1998: 251, 257).

At the turn of twentieth century, the cacophony over the discourse of decolonization in the colonial world was even more tangible. The height of the colonial era, around the

1900s, coincided with a period of reforms within the colonies themselves (Westad, 2005: 75). Criticism intensified with the lack of education, medical treatment, the inequality of the public service and generally with the lack of regard to the standard of living of the colonized people. Some reforms were undertaken, especially improvements of the educational system and health services. In some ways, these reformation policies generated future intellectual elite leaders who were concerned about European domination in their motherland. It is generally recognized that Westernized elites were central to the rise of nationalism in the colonial territories. Their role as, what Anderson (2006) called, the intelligentsias' vanguard derived from their literacy and bilingualism. Printed books, newspapers and magazines in Western languages helped to transfer knowledge from the West to colonized people. Their competence of bilingualism meant they had access to the modern Western culture in the broadest sense, and in particular, to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state formulated elsewhere in the course of nineteenth century (Anderson, 2006: 116).

Between 1880 and 1914, the world outside Europe and America was formally partitioned into territories under formal rule or informal political domination by Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, USA and Japan (Hobsbawm, 1989: 56). Within these colonial territories, the beginning of the global spread of nationalism, adjoining with religious revivalism, stimulated a new global resistance against colonialism. Although resistance was global in scale, the anti-colonial movement did not form a united force. However, the awareness to cooperate, built what Gramsci noted as an 'historical bloc', which gradually stimulated the following events in the world. Japan's triumph over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905 gave powerful stimuli to the development of 'Asian self-confidence' (Romein and Wertheim, 1956: 74). But World War I was the starting point for modern resistance against colonial rule and semi-colonial oppression (Westad, 2005: 79). The Great War presented challenges and opportunities for alternative

visions of world order. It obviously confirmed the moral crisis of the Eurocentric world order (Aydin, 2007). No wonder intellectual elites from the non-Western world were convinced that the moment had come to establish an alternative model suitable to the colonized world.

Such alternative visions of world order were needed to replace the old political and economic system since that system, as the Chinese phrase put it, had 'lost the mandate of heaven' (Hobsbawm, 1996: 55). The rise to power of the Bolsheviks in 1917 gave the world this signal. Russian revolution brought a spirit to break the imperialist chain in the oppressed world by replacing colonialism and capitalism with self-determination and socialism. Lenin's dictum, that "colonialism is the worst and the most extreme form of capitalism, but also it's last" could not fail to impress anti-imperialists in Asia and Africa (Kimche, 1973: 3). By 1919 the Soviet Communist Party set up the Comintern, a worldwide organization headquartered in Moscow, prepared to become the basis for other revolutionaries' parties to come. To accelerate a united struggle between Soviet Communist and other progressive movements outside Russia, the Comintern held international congresses in 1920, first in Moscow at the Second Comintern Congress and later in Baku at the Congress of Eastern Peoples (Mišković, 2014: 2). The Second Comintern and the Baku Congress were important political events for the revolutionary nationalist movement in colonial Asia and Africa as it had the objective to create an international alliance between the people under colonial rule and the new Soviet Russia with its instigation forming a world proletariat working class revolution.<sup>2</sup>

The influence of Soviet communism was significant not only to the communist party but also to the nationalist movement in general in the colonial countries. This was

<sup>2</sup> In the Second Comintern Congress, there was a debate of the possibility of building an alliance between revolutionary working class and the bourgeois nationalist elites. Lenin recommended this alliance formation, as he doubted that an alliance between the worker's movement and the oppressed people would be strong enough to become a powerful movement. However, Lenin's recommendation was opposed by other participants, such as M.N. Roy and Stalin who remained steady refusing bourgeois elements in the communist movement.



prompted by very little horizontal cooperation among the various nationalist movements. Jawaharlal Nehru of India pointed out that “the tendency of Asian nationalist movements to follow the leadership of the Soviet communist party is dependent on the degree to which their deep-rooted anti-colonial impulse is ignored by the Western powers” (Kimche, 1973: 3). In fact, neither anti-imperialist opposition nor nationalist elites of the colonies had any particular interest in an alliance with the communists at first (Mišković, 2014: 2). They all were more interested in and put their hopes into Wilson’s idea of self-determination and equality of the nations (Manela, 2007: 7-8). Wilson’s rhetoric message of self-determination and re-organization of world order had been across the globe and was captured enthusiastically by the leaders of the emerging non-Western nationalistic movements in India, China, Korea and Egypt. According to Manela (2007), ‘the Wilsonian moment’ presented these elites with “unprecedented opportunities to advance claims in the name of emerging national identities and thus bolster and expand their legitimacy both at home and abroad” (p. 8).

At the time of the armistice in November 1918, nationalists of the colonial world were convinced that the road to self-determination would pass through Paris. They launched broad campaigns to echo their message there (Manela, 2007: 12). However, they were bitterly disappointed when it became clear that their efforts to claim these rights had failed as the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 did not listen to the Asian and African national movements. It even seems that the Wilsonian moment collapsed when the newly founded League of Nations turned out to be a disappointment in offering a possibility to realize their objectives within an international community dominated by the European colonial powers. It was quite clear to the nationalist leaders that the League simply formalized and legitimized the *status quo* of European powers to sustain their control over the colonies (Triska and Koch Jr, 1959: 419).

As the League proved to be a disappointment, the Afro-Asian leaders looked for alternatives. The best option was to turn to

the Comintern as a commensurable institution to the League and in line with their aims. In the early interwar period, the Comintern was vibrant in converging the leaders of nationalist movements of colonized countries with the labor and socialist international. Also, contacts and relationships between the leaders of nationalist movements of colonial Asia and Africa, were gradually established and strengthened, particularly in metropolises. This supported an historic moment in Brussels, where the leaders of the future of Asia and Africa gathered to fulminate against imperialism.

### BRUSSELS 1927: THE LEAGUE AGAINST IMPERIALISM

“I recall in this connection the conference of the “League Against Imperialism and Colonialism” which was held in Brussels almost thirty years ago. At that conference many distinguished delegates who are present here today met each other and found new strength in their fight for independence.”

Sukarno “Let a New Asia and Africa Be Born!”  
Opening Speech at the Bandung Conference  
18 April 1955

In his impassioned opening speech at the Bandung Conference, Sukarno recalled the pivotal role of the Brussels meeting as an historic moment that was chronologically linked to the Bandung Conference (Abdulgani, R., 1950-1976, ‘President Sukarno Speech at the Opening Ceremony of AA Conference on April 18, 1955’, 1955). The Brussels Conference was a milestone for emerging colonial nations, as it was the first time for leaders of Asia, Africa and America to converge in one place to discuss European imperialism and colonial oppression. This assembly was organized by Willi Münzenberg, a German communist and member of the German Reichstag, who had a close relationship with the Comintern (Paterson, 2013; Prashad, 2007). Since 1921, after the years of War Communism in Soviet Russia (1918-1921), the Comintern was increasingly ambitious to establish direct connections with the colonies, which up until 1927 had been minimal (Paterson, 2014: 52). The Brussels Conference was part of this process as a projection of the Comintern’s ambition in

spreading communism around the world.

Although the Association of Oppressed Peoples had strong communist leanings, a fair number of non-communist nationalists and radicals and pacifists also attended the conference. Many distinguished and prominent delegates from Asian-African countries came and made direct contact at Brussels. It was here that Jawaharlal Nehru, who represented the Indian National Congress, made the acquaintance of Moh. Hatta, leader of Perhimpunan Indonesia, and Lamine Senghor, the French-based Senegalese and delegate of the Committee in Defence of the Negro Race. This conference was also attended by Hansin Liau from the Kuomintang, Hafiz Ramadhan Bey from Egypt, Hadj Ahmed Messali from Algeria and James La Guma and Josiah Gumede from South Africa (League Against Imperialism Archives, 1926-1931, 'List of Organizations and Delegates Attending the Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism', February 10, 1927; Paterson, 2014: 51-2; Mišković, 2014: 2).

The conference received the support from Nobel Prize winners Romain Rolland and Albert Einstein, who served as honorary presidents of the conference jointly with Soong Ching-Ling, the widow of the prominent Kuomintang founder Sun Yat-Sen and the British theosophist and leader of Labor Party, George Lansbury (League Against Imperialism Archives, 1926-1931, 'List of Organizations and Delegates Attending the Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism', February 10, 1927). In total, 174 delegates representing 134 organizations, associations or political parties from 34 countries participated in the Brussels Conference. As one of delegates, Nehru (1936) wrote in his autobiography, "there were also present at Brussels representatives from the national organization of Java, Indochina, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Arabs from North Africa and African Negroes" (p. 162). Meanwhile in *Indonesia Merdeka*, Perhimpunan Indonesia's journal, Hatta (1972) gave testimony that never before had the world seen such a congress gathered.

The congress agenda was mainly about imperialism and its consequences in the colonial

countries (League Against Imperialism Archives, 1926-1931, 'Agenda of the Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, February 10, 1927). Each of the delegates was given an opportunity to offer their perspective related to the issue of colonialism or imperialism within their own countries. The Indian delegate, in the session on 'British imperialism in India, Persia and Mesopotamia', for instance, drew attention to the current condition of British imperialism in India and the nationalist struggle with it, whereas the Indonesian representatives addressed the urgency of democratic reform in Indonesian society and freedom from the Dutch colonialism (League Against Imperialism Archives, 1926-1931, 'Résolution de la délégation indienne concernant l'Indie'; 'Interview par Daniele Martini avec Jawahar Lal Nehru, représentant de l'Indie: 'La libération de l'Indie est la fin de l'impérialisme anglais'; 'Resolution betreffs Indonesien (Niederländisch-indische Kolonien) eigenbracht von der Indonesischen Delegation', 1927).

At the end of meeting on February 13, 1927, all representatives of the conference promulgated the Congress Manifesto in which they agreed to set up 'League Against Imperialism and for National Independence'. As noted in the opening of manifesto, this league was responsible to "a position in which hundreds of millions of men are condemned culturally and violently to suffer material and moral stagnation and to remain the involuntary victims of foreign capitalism" (League Against Imperialism Archives, 1926-1931, 'Manifest de Brüsseler Kongresses gegen den Imperialismus 1927', 1927). Therefore, the Brussels Conference, according to Prashad (2007), was disseminating "the idea for the rights of the darker nations to rule themselves" (p. 22).

The importance of the Brussels Congress to the colonies was that it made the participants aware they were not alone and that cooperation among them would strengthen them in their struggle for independence (Kimche, 1973: 5). In his testimony, Nehru (1936) confessed that the Brussels Conference "helped me to understand some of the problems of colonial and dependent countries" (p. 163). Afterwards, he admitted,

from insight which he got from the congress, that “contact between the various people will lead to a better understanding of each others’ problems and difficulties and is bound to result in closer cooperation which is bound to bring success nearer to all” (Kimche, 1973: 5). At the Brussels Conference, it was the first time he reflected on the idea of forming an ‘Asiatic Federation’. This federation, he thought, was not solely “due to any special feeling against Western powers but to a drawing together of the Asiatic elements and recognition of a common bond uniting them” (Mišković, 2014: 3). After his return to India, Nehru reported on the Brussels Conference to the Indian National Congress. He proposed the Congress maintain relations with the League Against Imperialism and urged the Congress to make closer contact with other Asian nationalists. As a result of Nehru’s report, the Congress created a foreign department in 1928 to develop contacts with other anti-imperialist forces (Brecher, 1959: 112).

During the interwar period, solidarity based on racial formation was increasingly expressed elsewhere. The reflection through ideologies of race continued as potential alternatives for expressing discontent with the interwar era world order in the Asia and African world. Besides the Brussels Conference, a series of pan-African Congresses was organized to readdress the issue faced by Africa pertaining to European colonization of most of the continent. Four congresses were held between 1919 and 1927, continuing on from an initial pan-African Congress, which had been held in London in 1900. The first meeting of pan-African Congress was held in Paris (1919), the second and third in London (1921 and 1923) and the last one in New York (1927). Meanwhile, the pan-Asianist activities during the early interwar period showed its connection with the rising nationalist movement. Anti-colonial nationalist movements were popularly interpreted as a revival of Asia and thus associated with a vague notion of Asian triumph over the West (Aydin, 2007: 149). Ôkawa Shûmei, a prominent pan-Asianist thinker, in *Fukkô Ajia no Shomondai* (Problems of Resurgent Asia), published in 1922, “hailed the movements initiated by Gandhi in

India and Mustafa Kemal Pasha in Turkey as a new type of Asian revival, though they were different in character” (Aydin, 2007: 150). Asia, according to him, was the site of a universal struggle for freedom from colonial enslavement. He criticized the role of the League of Nations on its internationalism as no more than a reaction to Asia’s nationalist awakening that invoked to guarantee the colonial possession of France and Britain. Thus, he reiterated that Pan-Asian solidarity was “a necessary first step in the creation of an internationalism based on the equality of the Asian and Western nations” (Aydin 2007: 150).

These regional formations had a wide appreciation for the universal struggle against imperialism. But only the Brussels Conference could unite these regional or racial solidarities, despite the fact that they not only had different race identities but they also had different political identities. For the first time an organization was established of mixed race solidarity based on a similar alternative vision for a more humane world. However, the sustainability of the League Against Imperialism did not survive long. By the end of 1920s, the antagonism between the nationalist movements and the Comintern could not be resolved. The efforts to maintain this unique league were eventually in vain. Despite the fact that the alliance lasted only a short time, according to Prashad (2007), “the regional formation did gather after Brussels, and many of these provided the bedrock of the Third World” (p. 22). It also makes sense, to address the Brussels Conference as an epitome of the formative years of the Asian-African cooperation, which culminated in a massive gathering of Asian-African nations in Bandung in 1955.

### NEW DELHI 1947: ASIAN RELATIONS CONFERENCE

World War II had a revolutionary impact on colonialism. It facilitated the rise of anti-colonial powers and the demise of the Great Powers of Europe. Myrdal states that “it was during and immediately after WW II that all the forces and pressures that had been gradually weakening the European colonial power system came

together to effect its final collapse” (Kimche, 1973: 8). The results of the war finally exploded the myth of European superiority and unleashed among non-Europeans ideas of freedom and equality (Kimche, 1973: 11). However, although the anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa were ardent during WW II, there was no notable congress under the banner of anti-imperialist networks. In 1947 there was one conference believed by historians to have been significant as a pathway to the Bandung Conference, namely the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 in New Delhi.

Historians such as Kweku Ampiah (2007), David Kimche (1973) and Jamie Mackie (2010) mention the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947 as the foundation of the Bandung Conference of 1955. One of the arguments, given by Ampiah (2007), is that the conference held in Purana Qila (Old Port) New Delhi from 23 March to 2 April 1947 brought together representatives from Asian countries as one cohesive unit against the stagnation wrought upon them by alien, specifically European domination. There were over 200 delegates representing 28 Asian countries at the Asian Relations Conference (Asian Relations Organizations, 1948: 8). The *Washington Post* (1947) put a headline “Half of Mankind Is Joined in Asia Parley” while *Irish Times* (1947) placed a title “Dawn in Asia” for this meeting. The gathering had been organized by the non-official Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), a body which had been formed by the Indian Congress in 1943 pertaining to international affairs. Though it was organized by ICWA, according to Stolte (2014), “the Asian Relations Conference was largely the brainchild of Jawaharlal Nehru and partly the fruit of his (and other Indian anti-imperialists) long efforts towards Asian cooperation, which had begun in earnest in the early 1920s” (p. 59). In terms of participants and contents, the Asian Relations Conference can be considered as a continuation of the Asianist and anti-imperialist movements of the interwar period (Stolte, 2014: 59).

The Asian Relations Conference was dominated by three themes: Asian solidarity, decolonization and problems arising out of the

sub-development of Asia (Kimche, 1973: 30). In his inaugural address at the conference Nehru stated that “the Asian Relations Conference itself is significant as an expression of that deeper urge of the mind and spirit of Asia which had persisted in spite of isolationism which grew up during the years of European domination” (Asian Relations Organizations, 1948: 23). The central purpose of the conference, for Nehru himself, was to determine what ‘Asia’ and ‘Asia-ness’ now stood for (Singh, 2011: 58). In his own words, “Asia now lives in a tremendous age of transition ... in this crisis in world history Asia will necessarily play a vital role” (Asian Relations Organizations, 1948: 21, 24). Then, Asia, from his perspective, “can no longer be used as pawns by others: they are bound to have their own policies in world affairs” (Asian Relations Organizations, 1948: 24). What was important for the Asians at that moment was to take a greater role in world affairs but first Asia should have its freedom and its independence from colonial domination (*The Manchester Guardian*, 1947; Jones, 1947; Singh, 2011). The leader of the Indonesian delegation, Abu Hanifah, emphasized the importance of freedom for a nation, he said, “Indonesian people are always, decisively and consistently working for the promotions of world peace and prosperity but we are convinced that ‘only an independent Indonesia’ can fulfill this task” (Asian Relations Organization, 1948: 48). Nehru also argued that national freedom is the right of every race in human history. At the conference, he then urged Asians to take a responsibility to help ‘their suffering brethren in Africa’ (Asian Relations Organization, 1948: 26).

The Asian Relations Conference was the first occasion for Asian political leaders to express the primary political dilemmas facing new Asian states. The legacy of the Asian Relations Conference was not an immediately tangible political result but it did bring an opportunity to unify a political vision and create closer cooperation among Asian countries. The conference was fairly successful in translating the concerns of prewar anti-imperialism to postwar decolonization and helped thinking about Asia’s place in the emerging international constellation (Stolte, 2014: 70). Moreover, the



conference also accelerated the process of inter-Asian cooperation that was to give birth to Afro-Asianism (Kimche, 1973: 33). This can be seen when the Dutch military bombarded Indonesia in December 1948, and the Prime Minister of Burma U Nu suggested to Nehru to convene a meeting to discuss Indonesian independence. One month later, on 20 January 1949, 18 countries mostly from Asia assembled in New Delhi to discuss the ways to be taken to overcome the problem in Indonesia. This performance of unity was probably the conference's most lasting achievement (Stolte, 2014: 58).

### **FROM COLOMBO TO BOGOR 1954: THE EMERGENCE OF THE BANDUNG CONFERENCE**

To understand the background of the Bandung Conference of 1955, it is important to examine the international dimension of the Cold War, especially in Asia. Asia was the nucleus site of the global Cold War. The unrelenting struggle for power, influence and territory between proponents of capitalism and communism and democracy and totalitarianism affected the way of thinking of many Asian leaders. It was in the beginning of the Cold War that the ideas of the Asian-African Conference emerged. In addition to the Cold War, the second half of the twentieth century was also marked by the emergence of new independent nations, mostly in Asia and some in Africa, known later as the Third World. In the one-decade that followed the end of WW II, Western colonial empires were dismantled across Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. The newly emerging nations, according to McMahon (2013), "threw off the shackles of colonialism, boldly articulated their national aspirations, endeavored to achieve economic as well as political independence and became increasingly influential agents of their own destinies" (p. 1-2). During the early years of the Cold War, the Third World played a pivotal role as a vibrant new force, amidst the two superpowers, challenging Western dominance, campaigning sovereignty and promoting world peace. When the crisis of the global Cold War took place in the Southern hemisphere, it encouraged them

to take a response by discussing and seeking a 'third way' to resolve the current problems beyond the Washington and Moscow visions. Here I present the story of the Colombo and the Bogor Conferences in 1954 as predecessor of the Bandung Conference of 1955.

The idea to organize an Asian-African Conference emerged for the first time during the meeting of five countries – Burma, Indonesia, India, Ceylon and Pakistan – known as the 'Colombo Powers' at Colombo and then at Kandy, Ceylon in 1954 (Abdulgani, 1980; Mackie, 2005; Tan and Acharya, 2008). The Colombo Conference was an initiative of Ceylon Prime Minister John Kotelawa who invited four leaders of other newly independent Asian states to the capital of Ceylon. Initially, as suggested by Kotewala, the conference was intended to be informal. It had no fixed agenda, and was essentially just meant to show a bloc of newly independent Southeast Asian countries in order to become a new effective force in the council of world affairs (Mackie, 2005: 54; Reid, 2008: 23). However, as time passed, the situation in Southeast Asia changed, overshadowed by the crisis in Vietnam. The war in Vietnam increasingly compelled the other Asian countries such as Indonesia and India to propose the special agenda to discuss the current situation in Vietnam at Colombo. In January 1954, the Indonesians made a discreet proposal for holding a conference of the heads of government of Egypt, Pakistan, India, Burma and Ceylon to talk about the situation in Vietnam and North Africa (Kimche, 1973: 43). Four days before the Colombo Conference, on 24 April 1954, Nehru announced a six point proposal in the Indian Parliament that contained recommendations for a cease-fire in Vietnam and the necessity of complete independence for Vietnam as a solution to resolve the conflict (Stargardt, 1989: 577).

The issue of the precarious circumstances in Vietnam was one of the key matters at the Colombo Conference. The meeting reviewed the war in Vietnam and welcomed the initiative of the Geneva Conference, which had been held two days before the Colombo Congress, to take a stand on the predicament of Vietnam (Tarling, 1992: 77). The Colombo Powers urged

for a non-intervention in their response to the Vietnam War and for the organization of Asian regional cooperation (Acharya, 2009: 37). According to Acharya (2009), by “invoking this internationally accepted principle offered the Colombo Powers a convenient basis for assuming a role in a regional conflict to an extent their combined material power could not have” (p. 37). In addition to criticizing French military action in Vietnam, this conference discussed many important issues in Asia, such as the risk of the hydrogen bomb, colonialism and racialism, international communism and economic cooperation in Southeast Asia (Mackie 2005: 54). The Colombo Five regretted that colonialism still existed in various part of the world, pointing to Morocco and Tunisia in particular (Tarling, 2006: 91). Both Ceylon and Pakistan raised the issue of the communist manoeuvres in Asia. They declared communist aggression and infiltration as a threat facing the region (Mukherji, 2008: 167). But Nehru had different opinion. He insisted that resolutions condemning communism were commensurate with taking sides with the West in the Cold War and that this was incompatible when juxtaposed with India’s policy of non-alignment (Kimche, 1973: 45).

In the midst of these discussions, during the sixth session of the Colombo Conference on 30 April 1954, the Indonesian Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo proposed the idea of an Asian-African Conference to be held in Indonesia under the sponsorship of the Colombo Powers. When Ali presented this idea, he elaborated that the conference would be “a conference, similar in nature to the present conference, but wider in scope, to include not only countries of Asia but some countries of Africa as well” (Abdulgani, 1980: 13). His proposal was not received enthusiastically in first instance. U Nu and Moh. Ali seemed somewhat hesitant but did not dare to refuse outright (Abdulgani, 1980: 14). While Nehru’s was skeptical as many problems would have to be overcome to organize such a big conference. It was not all about the technical problems that Nehru was skeptical about. He perceived that if the conference was to achieve a consensus that was prepared to make an impact in world affairs, it would be hard to synchronize

such a huge number of participants with many diverse opinions.

However, Ali Sastroamidjojo did not retreat from his idea. His persistence and persuasiveness eventually succeeded influencing the beliefs of other participants. Nehru finally proposed the conference to agree that the prime ministers gave the moral support to Indonesia on initiative of the Asian-African Conference. In its final clause the conference communiqué declared:

“The Prime Ministers discussed the desirability of holding a Conference of African-Asian Nations, and favored a proposal that the Prime Minister of Indonesia might explore the possibility of such a conference” (Sastroamidjojo, 1974: 466; Abdulgani, 1980: 14).

Further, what were important steps for Indonesia was to prepare invitations for the countries that should be invited. Prior to this, but no less important was to discuss this plan more intensely with the countries that had supported this idea in Colombo. Ali then visited New Delhi in late September 1954. Nehru welcomed him in his office and then promulgated a Joint Statement on 25 September 1954 to support the implementation of an Asian-African Conference as soon as possible. A similar statement was also issued by Indonesia’s Prime Minister and Burma’s Prime Minister in Rangoon on 28 September 1954. When all of them agreed to reassemble, the second prime ministers meeting was held in Bogor on 28-30 December 1954.

On 28 December Ali Sastroamidjojo opened the Bogor Conference with his perspective on the current international developments, particularly in Asia, since the first Prime Ministers conference in Colombo eight months ago (Palar, L. N., 1928-1981, ‘Short Report on Five Sessions of the Five Minister’s Conference in Bogor 28 December 1954’, 1954). He pointed out that although the tension in Vietnam has been somewhat abated, the tension was still potentially there, especially between the US and China. Afterwards, he reported on the progress of formal invitations that he had sent to sixteen countries in Asia and Africa to share the idea of an Asian-African Conference. Fourteen of these countries had given a positive response and all

of them agreed that the conference should be conducted as quickly as possible in Indonesia. In addition, some countries suggested that China and Taiwan should both be invited to this conference. But, the prospect of inviting China engendered a long debate among the participants of the Bogor Conference. For Indonesia, India and Burma, China was still expected to play a pivotal role in world peace, but Pakistan and Ceylon were more with the Western bloc about the potential dangers of international communism in Asia (Abdulgani, 1980: 34). Replying to Ali's refusal for China, U Nu stated that a conference of Asian nations without China would be 'desolidifying' to Asian solidarity, so he insisted that "Burma may not attend the Asian African Conference in the case that China is not invited" (Abdulgani, 1980: 36).

As well as the debate on China's invitation to the congress, several countries also disputed an invitation to Israel, considered a 'border-line cases' state.<sup>3</sup> Burma and Ceylon did not mind inviting Israel but Indonesia and Pakistan had objections. Without opposing, Nehru took the view that if Israel attended the conference the Arab countries would probably refuse to participate. The decision at last was taken not to invite Israel to the conference after considering Nehru's argument. Moreover, it was decided to not invite either North or South Korea, "since political difficulties over their legal status posed insuperable problems, pending a peace treaty to end the Korean War" (Mackie, 2005: 65). All in all, twenty-five countries were to be invited to the conference, besides the five initiators.

The Bogor Conference raised again the issue of independence of Morocco and Tunisia. They also expressed their satisfaction on the outcome of the Geneva Conference on Vietnam and the cessation of hostilities (Palar, L. N., 1928-1981, 'Joint Communiqué of Prime Minister of Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan, 29 December 1954', 1954). One interesting issue that was raised by Indonesia on the issue of colonialism was about the future of West Irian (Irian Barat). To this matter, the other four prime ministers supported the stance of Indonesia. They stated their earnest hope that

the Dutch government opened negotiations with Indonesia to discuss the issue of West Irian.

The Prime Minister of India recalled that the influence of the Colombo countries on world affairs had been growing considerably, while the Prime Minister of Ceylon recalled that since the Colombo Conference, the Colombo powers had earned international recognition as a group and demonstrated that they were capable of bringing an impartial mind to bear on international problems (Palar, L. N., 1928-1981, 'Short Report on Five Sessions of the Five Minister's Conference in Bogor 28 December 1954', 1954). Moh. Ali emphasized that one common objective of the next Asian-African Conference was self-determination and peace in order that all nations may have the opportunity to develop their resources, moral and material (Palar, L. N., 1928-1981, 'Short Report on Five Sessions of the Five Minister's Conference in Bogor 28 December 1954', 1954). Amidst the discussion, India's delegation proposed that the purpose of the Asian-African Conference will be:

- a. To promote goodwill and cooperation among the nations of Asia and Africa, to explore and advance their mutual as well as common interest and to establish and further promote friendliness and neighborly relations.
- b. To consider social, economic and cultural problems and relations of the countries represented.
- c. To consider problems of special interest to Asian and African peoples, e.g. problems affecting national sovereignty and of racialism and colonialism.
- d. To view the position of Asia and Africa and their peoples in the world of today and the contribution they can make to the promotion of world peace and cooperation (Palar, L. N., 1928-1981, 'Short Report on Five Sessions of the Five Minister's Conference in Bogor 28 December 1954', 1954).

All five prime ministers, in a joint communiqué of Bogor, 29 December 1954, expressed their sincere hope that in 1955 they would see a continuation of growth in companionship and cooperation, both between the countries which

<sup>3</sup> Border-line cases means the counties which are considered to still have unclear situations.

would be represented at the conference and between the participants and other countries which would serve world peace (Palar, L. N., 1928-1981, 'Joint Communiqué of Prime Minister of Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan, 29 December 1954', 1954; Kementrian Penerangan, 1955: 66).

## CONCLUSION

The Bandung Conference was a culmination of an alternative chronology of world events organized by non-Western intellectuals and activists who had been oppressed by colonialism, racism and class superiority (Lee, 2010: 9). Nehru (1955) said, "it would be a misreading of history to regard Bandung as an isolated occurrence and not part of a great movement of human history" (p. 24). The roots of the Afro-Asian solidarity are gradually developed since the early 'age of extremes' by contacts, meetings and conferences. The precursors of the Bandung Conference included a series of pan-African Congresses that took place from 1900, the Universal Races Congress in London in 1911, two pan-Asian People's Conference held in Nagasaki in 1926 and Shanghai in 1927 and more importantly the League Against Imperialism Conference in Brussels in 1927 and the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947.

In this article, I underline the role of the Brussels Conference and the Asian Relations Conference as important milestones that contributed substantially to the formation of Afro-Asian solidarity. The Brussels Conference is important because the regional formation gathered at Brussels provided the bedrock of the Third World. The conference helped the nationalist and anti-imperialist leaders of Asian and African countries to make direct contact and to establish stronger relationships and networks. Yet, the significant connection between Brussels and Bandung has remained underexposed by historians. The historiography of the Bandung Conference mostly identifies the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 as its foundation. The Asian Relations Conference was arguably important to strengthen the sense of solidarity of Asian Countries in facing the political dilemma of the new Asian states. This conference significantly

helped to re-contextualize the problems of the Asianist and anti-imperialist movements from the transition of prewar anti-imperialism to postwar decolonization. It brought an opportunity to unify a political vision and further cooperation among Asian countries. Abraham (2008) states that it is possible to trace discursive continuities of the minority problem faced by the newly independent colonial states only by seeing Bandung in relation to the Asian Relations Conference (p. 48).

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