Bandung at 70

Multilateralism in a New Era of Multi-Alignment



With contributions by Dima Al-Khatib, Nabil Fahmy, Arif Havas Oegroseno, Nathalie Tocci, Jürgen Trittin

Körber Stiftung

Robert Bosch Stiftung

1955

Twenty-nine African and Asian countries meet in Bandung, Indonesia, most of them soon after independence, to promote solidarity, sovereignty and neutrality, agreeing on ten Principles for Peaceful Coexistence.

1961

The Non-Aligned Movement is founded in Belgrade, in then Yugoslavia, as a platform for countries to stay neutral between the Cold War powers.

1974

The Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order is adopted, pushing for more equitable trade.

1978

The Buenos Aires Plan of Action institutionalizes South-South cooperation, especially regarding development cooperation.

1991

The end of the Soviet Union results in a fundamental shift in global order, with nations seeking new alliances, economic strategies or greater influence.

Bandung at 70

2009

The establishment of BRIC (since 2020 BRICS) aims to reform the international economic and financial order, giving more consideration to emerging powers and reflecting the multipolar reality of the 21st century.

2015

The Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals are adopted, both significant for North-South cooperation, promoting climate action and sustainable development.

2020

The COVID-19 pandemic exposes global inequalities, highlighting the need for North-South cooperation on health, vaccine access and economic recovery.

2025

Seventy years after Bandung, the next world order is straining to be born. Global South countries still call for international reform. What could a positive agenda look like, and what role can Europe play in it?

In cooperation with:



BRICS
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Dear readers,

The world is facing profound and overlapping crises that shake the foundations of multilateral cooperation. A climate once shaped by collaboration is increasingly giving way to aggressive geopolitical competition, zero-sum politics and neo-imperialist tendencies. The global rise of authoritarianism – including in Western democracies – aggravates this trend, undermining trust and legitimacy in international institutions.

The multilateral structures created by the West are faltering in the face of new realities. Of course, since its founding, this often-lamented declining order suffered from dysfunctionality, double standards, and asymmetrical power relations and benefit distribution. It has essentially been selective rather than comprehensive, transformative and sustainable for the majority of societies.

But the need for effective, equitable and sustainable international cooperation has never been greater than it is today. From climate change to global health, migration and peacebuilding, cross-border challenges demand collective responses. To meet that demand, multilateralism must change by becoming more inclusive, resilient, fair and locally rooted in its structures and outcomes.

Germany, as a long-standing advocate and beneficiary of multilateralism, is called upon to play a constructive role. However, it faces growing credibility challenges due to its selective application of international law as well as to its own internal and external uncertainties. This moment calls for reflection, renewal and bold leadership.

In today's context of new forms of imperialism, power asymmetries and systemic inequality, the legacies of the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement offer timely inspiration. They further valuable thinking related to collective advocacy and agency, sovereignty, equitable cooperation, unity despite divergence and South-South cooperation. The Bandung experience also raises central questions around political will for principled policies, institutional design and accountability.

We are pleased to support Körber-Stiftung's important initiative to revisit Bandung and explore its relevance for today's reform efforts. In times of uncertainty, such collaboration is key to shaping a more just and sustainable global future.

October 2025



Raphaela Schweiger
Director Global Issues
Robert Bosch Stiftung



Dina Fakoussa
Senior Project Manager Global Issues
Robert Bosch Stiftung

1955

The first Asian-African or Afro-Asian Conference took place in 1955. It is popularly known as the Bandung Conference (taking its name from the city in Indonesia where it was held). The conference was attended by delegations from 29 mostly newly independent nations. Together, they rejected colonialism and issued the Declaration on Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation, also known as the Bandung Principles, which are based on sovereignty, non-interference and peaceful coexistence. The legacy of this moment of shared solidarity is widely regarded as the Bandung Spirit.

2025

Today, the world is in a state of polycrisis. The rules-based international system is under threat from many sides, particularly from the great powers. Issues of national sovereignty and territorial integrity are once again back on the table. Calls for global collective action in response to transnational crises relating to health, climate change, digital sovereignty and poverty are increasingly being disregarded. While the world is becoming gradually more multipolar, the need for international reform has never been greater.

Dear readers,

Germany and Europe are facing a dilemma: long-standing alliances, essential for responding to ever-greater global challenges, are becoming less reliable. For decades, the US-led liberal international order provided the security umbrella and economic framework from which Germany and other European states benefited immensely. Today, that spine looks fragile.

Yet there is cause for cautious optimism. While the transatlantic alliance and Europe remain central to Germany's foreign policy, today's challenges cannot be met without also building complementary partnerships beyond the West. Europe, which is investing in its competitiveness and security capabilities, can position itself as an attractive partner for countries in the Global South. Exploring common interests is essential, while at the same time acknowledging divergences in values and priorities that will shape cooperation. The shift of power from West to East, accelerated by isolationist trends in the former, forces Germany and Europe to think beyond familiar frameworks. The task is not to choose between old and new partners but to align them.

Seventy years ago, in 1955, leaders of 29 mostly newly independent states gathered at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia. Often overlooked in the West, Bandung is remembered in the Global South as a turning point and a foundation of the Non-Aligned Movement. Its spirit continues to reverberate and carries enduring impulses into the present. Earlier this year, Körber-Stiftung organised a Global History and Politics Dialogue in Bandung to reflect on these legacies. The discussions highlighted that Bandung should not be re-enacted but treated as a toolkit for today: its principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, cooperation and solidarity are relevant reference points for renewing multilateralism. This publication delves deeper into and builds on these discussions, exploring how Germany and Europe can engage constructively with partners in the Global South.

We are particularly grateful to the Robert Bosch Stiftung, whose support made this publication possible. With this first collaboration, our two foundations aim to send a joint impulse for renewed dialogue between Europe and the Global South. Combining our strengths and building synergies is more necessary than ever in the face of pressing challenges, with innovation and partnership needed on all fronts. For Körber-Stiftung, keeping this conversation alive – connecting history to politics, Europe to the Global South and past lessons to future challenges – remains a central task.

Enjoy reading!

October 2025



Thomas Paulsen
Chairman of the Executive Board
Körber-Stiftung











Contents

8 **Editorial: Bandung at 70**

12 **Policy Recommendations**

14 **Indonesia's Non-Aligned Future**
H.E. Arif Havas Oegroseno

17 **Replacing Unjust Multilateralism**
Jürgen Trittin

19 **(Mis)remembering Bandung at 70**
Carolien Stolte

22 **Beyond a Balance of Power**
Nabil Fahmy

25 **The Ghost of Bandung**
Nathalie Tocci

28 **Selective Solidarity**
Andreas Rödder

29 Deep Dive
Unfinished Business
Poppy S. Winanti

32 **Why Does Solidarity Fail?**
Swapna Kona Nayudu

35 Deep Dive
A Fairer Future Through South-South and Triangular Cooperation
Dima Al-Khatib

38 **The End of the Old Order**
Michael Werz

41 Deep Dive
Building a Non-Aligned Technologies Movement
Ingrid Schneider

44 Deep Dive
Keeping the Peace in a World Beyond Blocs
Hafsa Maalim, Shafqat Munir

47 **From Bandung to BRICS**
Indrajit Roy

50 Deep Dive
From Bandung to IDA: A Journey of Solidarity and Development
Axel van Trotsenburg

53 **From Bandung Spirit to Shared Future**
Jing Huang

56 **Endnotes**











Bandung at 70

While the Bandung Conference's vision remains unrealised, its spirit can be an inspiration to reform and innovate in the international system as well as to ensure the survival of multilateralism – not only for today's multi-aligned descendants of the conference participants but also for countries in Europe and beyond.

When Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva opened the BRICS summit in Rio de Janeiro in July 2025, he described the grouping as an 'heir of the Non-Aligned Movement'. While this might not come as a surprise from a leader of the Global South, it is striking when echoed by a European leader. Speaking at the UN General Assembly in 2023, Chancellor Olaf Scholz noted that the call for self-determination and sovereign equality made by African and Asian states in Bandung, Indonesia, 'seems more relevant today than ever before'.[1]

That a vision set out 70 years ago is considered relevant in today's vastly different environment speaks to the global yearning for the universality and shared solidarity it expressed. In that hopeful era, the leaders of 29 mostly newly independent countries from Africa and Asia enshrined their hopes for the post-colonial world in the ten Bandung Principles, including respect for sovereignty, non-interference and peaceful coexistence. Six years later, this led to the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1961, as countries refused to take sides in the Cold War. While the non-alignment principle rejected a pole-centric view of the global order, the NAM had little choice but to accept it. At the same time, though, the NAM rejected the vision of an international system dominated by the Western and Soviet blocs. This shift marked a move from non-alignment as an ideal – seeking to avoid polarity – to the movement's reality as a semi-organised bloc that effectively was a 'third pole' in the Cold War order.

> **'Much progress has been made in line with the Bandung Principles. More of the world is attuned to Bandung today than ever: nearly three-quarter of countries are non-aligned – or multi-aligned.'**

Much progress has been made in line with the Bandung Principles. More of the world is attuned to Bandung today than ever: nearly three-quarter of countries are non-aligned – or multi-aligned. Nations are robustly defending their sovereignty; and, at least in principle, racial equality is an accepted fact, as, rhetorically, is the need for an equal distribution of power among countries. The four successive G20 presidencies held by developing countries – Indonesia, India, Brazil and South Africa – since 2022 and the African Union's membership in the group signal how Bandung's call for a more inclusive and multipolar order is now embodied in international platforms and groupings that have further amplified its global reach. The number of guest countries from the Global South invited to summits of the essentially Western G7 has increased.

Yet in 2025, so much remains the same. As in 1955, when the world was emerging from wars and

colonialism, there is a polycrisis today. The 'rules-based order', built on the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations, which made the world more peaceful and prosperous over a long period, is violated by its architects. With its erosion, multiple conflicts are ongoing while issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity, neo-colonialism and non-interference are back on the table. Normative revisionism is becoming the order of the day with international law and norms under assault from multiple sides. Issues of migration blur the line between domestic and international affairs. Meta-crises of health, climate change and poverty call for global collective action, yet such action is increasingly in short supply.

> **'Veto-holding powers in particular display a distinct lack of interest in creating an equitable new order or reforming the old one.'**

Veto-holding powers in particular display a distinct lack of interest in creating an equitable new order or reforming the old one. While many in Europe are aware of the necessity of international reform, they still question the legitimacy of those advocating it, as seen with the African peace mission to Russia and Ukraine in 2023, where scepticism toward Africa's role as a mediator reflected broader doubts about who is entitled to shape international solutions. Even when it comes to new groupings like BRICS, their lack of collective advocacy limits their impact on efforts to reform or to remake the global order. Similarly, many in the Global South are sceptical about European calls for an alliance for multilateralism, seeing these as a self-serving attempt to maintain the status quo rather than develop a new multilateralism that is fit for purpose and has wider global legitimacy.

At Körber-Stiftung's Global History & Politics Dialogue conducted in Bandung earlier this year, the discussions revealed the prevalence of three political principles 70 years after the Bandung Conference: non-alignment, multi-alignment and neutrality. Multi-alignment is often described as the new face of non-alignment. Yet it is crucial to understand that these terms fundamentally represent different things in international politics. Non-alignment was essentially about values and visions of the global order, including the rejection of the two main perspectives that were on offer during the Cold War. The 'non' in non-alignment was a deliberate choice for the leaders of the NAM.[2] More than just an international stance or a national strategy, in the 1960s, non-alignment aimed to be a collective movement that united countries with diverse interests in a common voice that was aligned with neither the West nor the East. The NAM sought to protect the independence of countries that were all too familiar with colonial rule.

But non-alignment, as a movement, also underpinned the process of crafting an agenda for collective self-reliance, as it did in 1974 with the call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). Multi-alignment, on the other hand, comes across as a pragmatic hedging strategy – an adaptive approach for a multipolar world – that is increasingly relevant.

Neutrality is also regaining relevance but, unlike non-alignment and multi-alignment, it is not merely a strategy but rather a principle that leads to non-alignment and non-interference. It must be understood as the unwillingness to join any military alliance or take clear sides on the major crises or conflicts, but it does not include the passivity with which it is often associated.



Welcoming plate on the famous street 'Jalan Asia Afrika', referring to the international conference of April 1955.

While many countries have adopted neutrality on pressing geopolitical issues, they have also embraced multi-alignment to navigate the contemporary global disorder and emerging multipolarity in the international system. This is particularly true for energy-dependent countries like India, the world's second-largest importer of oil, and for others like Egypt and even Brazil, whose dependence on fertilizers from Russia and Ukraine has been disrupted by the war against Ukraine. Keeping their economies running is a key reason for neutrality and multi-alignment. However, this approach has drawn considerable criticism from Europe, where neutrality toward Russia's war is seen as difficult to reconcile with the UN Charter and collective responses to aggression. At the same

time, many in Europe acknowledge the developmental and energy imperatives behind such choices, but stress that neutrality should not weaken efforts to uphold international law, which countries in the Global South accuse Europe of actively undermining during the Gaza war.

A key feature of the Bandung Conference was economic decolonisation and the 'urgency of promoting economic development'.[3] The Bretton Woods conference in 1944 sought to set out the rules for economic engagement, but the terms of trade were unfavourable to developing countries, just as they were under colonisation. An attempt to rectify this was the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development held in 1964, where a set of proposals for more equitable trade and the dominance of international money, was put forward under the NIEO. The call for such an order, officially adopted in 1974, went unheeded, as the dominance of the order based on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank grew. Several ideas for a new NIEO have been pursued since, from the Netherlands-based Transnational Institute[4] and even in books published by the UN recommending a 'New, New International Economic Order'.[5]

Today, the complexity of the system has intensified. The debt crisis, especially for the developing world, is acute and unaddressed. The IMF's dominance is reduced, but the US dollar still dominates international trade and finance, even if an estimated 58 per cent of trade is de-dollarised.[6] For many of the Bandung countries, informal institutions provide crucial security and resilience, even if these are viewed as weak in the Global North. Remittances sent home by migrant workers and professionals abroad are an example of this as they often rely on informal networks such as the Hawala system.

Another feature of Bandung was an effort regarding energy, a scarce resource in much of the developing world. The Bandung communiqué mentioned especially the sharing of nuclear and atomic energy knowledge and systems. Over the years, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries has kept energy prices stable, providing some predictability, while at times also abusing its price-setting power. While US President Donald Trump has threatened sweeping penalties on all buyers of Russian oil, so far the brunt has fallen on India, which at the time of writing faces a 50 per cent US tariff — from a European perspective a necessary step to curtail Russia's revenue stream and end the war in Ukraine. Adding to the uncertainty is the limited supply of critical minerals, dominated by a few countries, that are crucial for clean energy technologies. The combination of technology, energy and critical minerals is a potent concentration of power, argued Ram Singh, director of the Delhi School of Economics, during our Bandung Dialogue in April.

How to overcome new monopolies in trade, funding and natural resources? One suggestion was that BRICS, which includes producers and consumers of energy, could provide a platform for energy cooperation, especially across the Global South. BRICS has a currency reserve arrangement, but its New Development Bank, which can provide an option besides the World Bank for developing countries, has not been strong or large enough to bail out troubled members. BRICS can provide a powerful critique of the global order and some of its members – such as Brazil, India, Indonesia and South Africa – potentially showcase the Global South's version of multilateralism. However, so far, it has operated as a collection of communities, with hundreds of annual meetings of various officials and ministers. Experts agree that BRICS will serve as a platform for coordination and issue-based cooperation only, and not as a replacement for the G7.

'Meanwhile, it is not difficult to replicate one Bandung success: continuous exchanges between the Global South countries.'

Meanwhile, it is not difficult to replicate one Bandung success: continuous exchanges between the Global South countries. Bandung created an 'everyday internationalism', says Carolien Stolte of Leiden University, and everyday internationalists claimed the Afro-Asian space. The 1950s and 1960s were replete with student exchange projects, legal exchanges, and jurists' visits.[7] Afro-Asian legal conferences took place without European influences. The first and largest Global South information exchange was the Non-Aligned News Agency Pool, a cooperation between non-aligned countries. It aimed to counter Western-biased reporting and was linked to the idea of a New World Information Communications Order, which sought a more balanced and democratised news flow, among 40 countries. Unfortunately, the agency faded away in the 1990s.

Even though today's digitalisation and its ecosystems have democratised information down to the individual, these systems are in flux, becoming prone to propaganda, misinformation and the influence of giant tech corporations. While there are still student exchanges, legal exchanges and jurist visits only happen if they are driven by bilateral relations.

In 1955, many countries felt alone and weak, says Nabil Fahmy, a former foreign minister of Egypt, and for them Bandung was an article of faith. At the conference, they found commonality and a path forward. Collective advocacy was the mark of Bandung. The *Times of India* wrote in 1954: 'we will see if solidarity trumps ideology'. In 1955, there was considerable disagreement among



The Asian-African Conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955.

participants yet, despite this, the 29 countries were stronger together.

In our multipolar world, with its multiple alignments, is it possible to be inspired by the still relevant Bandung Principles? And how to mobilize countries in the West with the spirit of Bandung to reform and innovate in the international system? What could be the common ground between middle powers in the Global South and Global North? What role can Europe and Germany play together with their multi-aligned partners to ensure the survival of multilateralism in this new era? More pressing, how can middle powers in the Global South and Global North make a common cause in defending international law, not least international humanitarian law, in a principled rather than selective manner?

> **‘What could be the common ground between middle powers in the Global South and Global North? What role can Europe and Germany play together with their multi-aligned partners to ensure the survival of multilateralism in this new era?’**

In this publication, more than a dozen authors from countries that participated in the Bandung Conference, from the wider Global South, and from Europe and Germany tackle these questions. They do so along several dimensions: values and interests (sovereignty, non-interference, human rights, global equity, solidarity), strategies and instruments (climate-change adaptation, debt restructuring, digital sovereignty, resource nationalism), modes of cooperation (South-South and triangular cooperation, regional alliances and ad hoc coalitions, platform diplomacy from the G20 to World Bank, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation and BRICS). The articles are not intended to produce consensus but to stage an informed conversation across vantage points – showing where interests align and where they diverge, and which steps are feasible now. The contributions share a commitment to treating the Bandung Spirit as a lens or toolkit, not a script – to interrogate its relevance, to learn from its limits and to engage it critically in order to find workable proposals for a renewed multilateralism fit for today’s fragmented, multi-aligned order. ↖

Florian Bigge & Julia Ganter, **Körber-Stiftung**; Carlos Frederico Coelho & Paulo Esteves, **BRICS Policy Center**; Galip Dalay, **Chatham House**; Dino Patti Djalal, **FPCI**; Manjeet Kripalani, **Gateway House**; Faisal Devji, **Oxford University**; Steven Gruzd, **SAIIA**

Policy Recommendations

In April 2025, Körber-Stiftung, together with partner institutions, convened a Global History & Politics Dialogue in Bandung to mark the 70th anniversary of the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference. With our partners in Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Africa and the United Kingdom, we took the conference's legacy as a starting point to probe the dynamics of non-alignment and multi-alignment as well as the future of multilateralism. The debates at the dialogue, the essays in this volume and the historical reflections they contain provide the foundation for the recommendations that follow. Our Bandung activities have shown that sovereignty, solidarity and collective advocacy – the impulses behind the Bandung Principles – can be reinterpreted as a toolkit for today. They highlight where Europe must engage as a partner, how South-South and triangular cooperation can reshape global governance, and why middle powers have become indispensable actors. We will continue to carry this debate forward with further dialogues, formats and follow-up publications that will refine these proposals, test them against political realities and add new recommendations to the discussion.

For Europe

1. **Act on two fronts:** The United States' leadership after the Second World War established institutions like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and NATO that provided stability and rules. Today, Washington's 'America First' retreat, a Western reluctance to build new flexible frameworks and resistance in parts of the West to reforming existing structures risk excluding Europe from emerging arrangements or leaving global governance dependent on minilateral formats. Europe should use its political and economic influence to persuade the United States to recommit to rules-based behaviour and engage with Global South partners to reform international institutions. Failure to do so will only benefit China, which has put forward its alternative with its Global Governance Initiative that combines historical narratives and institutional innovation, attracting Global South partners disillusioned by US unpredictability and European timidity. Europe should start the process of co-building flexible, rules-first frameworks with Global South partners.

2. **Engage like-minded states in non-Western forums:** Europe should take the Bandung Principles as evidence that many Global South countries have a non-Western, but not an anti-Western, tradition. It should build new cooperations and strengthen existing diplomatic and economic partnerships with like-minded forces within predominantly non-Western groupings, such as BRICS, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This includes engagement with key democratic countries like Brazil, India, Indonesia and South Africa. The West must confront its colonial history by acknowledging past wrongs, while also proclaiming its achievements with confidence, aligning its rhetoric with fairer policies. It should amplify inclusive historical narratives that stress cooperation, justice and mutual respect.

3. **Build collective capacity – and co-own it:** Operating on the premise that a more capable Global South is a more effective partner, Europe should move beyond rhetoric and fund concrete mechanisms that strengthen the collective capacity of middle powers and Global South countries, recognizing them as a force for positive transformation. This should include reshaping the global aid architecture; co-financing South-South initiatives through triangular cooperation; establishing knowledge hubs for the study of renewable energy, digital governance and regulation; developing human capital and supporting the development of downstream industries in countries that produce key raw materials.

For Global South countries

1. **Collectively reaffirm commitment to the Bandung Principles:** The Bandung spirit was tied to the UN Charter's commitment to sovereign equality and fundamental rights, not to rigid moral narratives of historical guilt. Global South countries should reassert this foundation as the common denominator of international politics and the basis for dialogue. This requires resisting broad-brush labels of 'perpetrators' and 'victims', which obscure more than they illuminate. They should leverage historical memory to foster nuanced understandings of ambiguity in international politics rather than moralize around it.

2. Build a 'buddy system' and assume responsibility: Emerging middle powers must play a more proactive role in sharing lessons from their economic diversification and regional integration. They should leverage their financial resources and diplomatic influence to advance a South-South economic architecture, moving beyond the aspirational New International Economic Order toward a practicable and more equitable system. Global South initiatives that can be fed into the global discussion as best practices could include setting common standards for sustainable investment, digital trade, and ethical sourcing of critical minerals; creating a debt relief/restructuring framework; and strengthening regional development banks.

3. Mark Bandung at 70 by launching substantive Africa-Asia projects: Global South countries can create joint ventures in strategic sectors like critical minerals and renewable-energy development, and programs that build Africa's industrial capacity. South-South cooperation could help to move beyond historical patterns of resource exploitation. In addition, Global South countries must use their collective strength (as seen in UN General Assembly resolutions, climate conferences and the COVAX platform during the COVID-19 pandemic) to advocate their interests and to apply the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement.

For all

1. Make international law the common ground: A legal observatory or policy forum should be established, jointly led by a country of the Global South and a European country, to monitor and report on violations of international law, ensuring its non-selective application and reinforcing principles like sovereignty and peaceful coexistence. It is important to recognize that middle powers (e.g., Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, Saudi Arabia) have the greatest economic and strategic stake in a predictable, rules-based order. A steering group of them should be created to reform international institutions. It would work incrementally, learning from 'easy wins' and eventually move on to the more intractable reform of the UN Security Council. These actions can demonstrate how unity can emerge from diversity.

2. Reimagine solidarity beyond state-led institutions: Policy-makers can experiment with hybrid forms of diplomacy that combine formal frameworks with small, flexible and locally rooted initiatives. For instance, the past attempts at 'Afro-Asianism' show that webs of solidarity often thrived in non-institutional, localized and fluid spaces – from conferences to informal gatherings – before becoming diluted once institutionalized. Bandung's 'everyday internationalism' can bridge humanistic visions of world politics and realpolitik to prevent the stagnation seen in the Non-Aligned Movement. The crucial role of nongovernmental organizations, philanthropic foundations and civil society networks in advancing human rights, climate action and democracy must be recognized and funded. Cross-border civil-society networks should also be backed to counter the 'nationalist international' of right-wing populism.

3. Adapt peacekeeping to today's conflicts: The UN should utilize the New Agenda for Peace framework to shift resources from crisis response to preventing conflict through diplomacy, early warning and risk reduction. Peacekeeping missions should be adequately funded and well organized to maintain basic civil order, especially in fragile states, making them more flexible and deepening collaboration with regional organizations.

Florian Bigge & Julia Ganter, **Körber-Stiftung**; Carlos Frederico Coelho & Paulo Esteves, **BRICS Policy Center**; Galip Dalay, **Chatham House**; Dino Patti Djalal, **FPCI**; Manjeet Kripalani, **Gateway House**; Faisal Devji, **Oxford University**; Steven Gruzd, **SAIIA**

Indonesia's Non-Aligned Future

Why the country that helped launch the NAM is key to its reinvention today.



The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was born in the crucible of decolonisation and Cold War tensions. It provided newly independent countries, including Indonesia, an alternative path in a polarised world dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. Its roots can be traced back to the landmark Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. Hosted by President Sukarno, it brought together leaders from 29 countries to promote economic cooperation and oppose colonialism. Bandung laid the ideological foundation for the NAM, emphasising principles such as mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference and peaceful coexistence, which were further codified during the first official NAM summit in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1961.

Indonesia played a pivotal role in the NAM's formation and direction. As one of the five founding countries, and in accordance with its 'Independent and Active Foreign Policy', it championed the idea that newly decolonised states should chart their own course in international politics – one rooted in independence, dignity and solidarity. Since the conference, which was a turning point for anti-colonial solidarity, more than 100 countries have gained independence, primarily in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. In recent decades, however, the pace of formation of new states has slowed considerably. Decolonisation as such seems to be a thing of the past. Against this backdrop, it is understandable if a nagging question emerges: how can the NAM remain relevant in the current global landscape?

In order to answer this question, one must reflect beyond the NAM's historical identity and delve deeper into the essence of its spirit. The pursuit of formal political independence for colonised countries is not the movement's ultimate goal; rather, independence should be viewed as a starting point for a broader pursuit of genuine sovereignty, welfare and global equity.

Today's global geopolitical situation is very different from, yet in many ways harrowingly similar to, that in the era of the Bandung Conference. While the Global South is no longer marked by countries' struggle for independence, systemic inequalities persist in global governance, trade and finance, with wealth and decision-making power still concentrated in the Global North. Furthermore, the world is again fragmenting; not into the Western and Eastern blocs of the past but into a multipolar and often unstable order. While the military power of the United States remains unchallenged, the global economic landscape tells a different story. US economic prowess is rivalled by the rising Asian economies. China is the second-largest economy and a leading force in trade, manufacturing and infrastructure investment, while India is experiencing rapid growth and technological advancement. This eastward economic tilt challenges Western-centric models of development and global leadership.

In addition, Big Tech, with its digital technologies including artificial intelligence (AI), is redefining sovereignty. Facing little regulation by governments, it has become a powerful geopolitical actor, influencing everything from national security to information flows and economic competitiveness. Companies like Amazon, Google and Microsoft are driving innovation and shaping global standards for data governance, surveillance and AI ethics. Social media platforms like Facebook and X play pivotal roles in political discourse and elections around the world, raising concerns over digital sovereignty and misinformation.

The strategic importance of technology in powering everything from smartphones to electric vehicles and military systems has triggered a new global competition for critical raw minerals. These resources are essential for batteries, semiconductors and renewable-energy technologies, which places mineral-rich regions in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia at the centre of geopolitical interest. China, the United States and the European Union are racing to secure supply chains for these through investment, trade agreements and strategic stockpiling. This scramble for resources risks replicating exploitative models of the past, prompting growing calls from Global South countries for resource sovereignty, fair value chains and environmental accountability. Furthermore, export controls on raw minerals and advanced chips as well as restrictions on investment in technology have become part of broader geopolitical tensions.

‘Today, colonialism no longer wears the overt guise of foreign rule, but it persists in the form of economic systems, intellectual dominance and global governance frameworks that systematically disadvantage the Global South.’

Meanwhile, climate change threatens the most vulnerable countries disproportionately, especially in the Global South, where limited resources and geographic exposure heighten the risks. Crises such as rising sea levels, disastrous flooding and prolonged droughts highlight the urgent need for equitable climate finance and adaptation strategies.

Between a multipolar global ‘disorder’, new emerging strategic actors and climate-change challenges, the NAM countries of the Global South remain disadvantaged by policies, institutions and practices that echo their colonial past. Today, colonialism no longer wears the overt guise of foreign rule, but it persists in the form of economic systems, intellectual dominance and global governance frameworks that systematically disadvantage the Global South.

One of the clearest examples is the vaccine inequality that haunted many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. While wealthy countries in the Global North secured billions of life-saving doses in advance, often far more than their population required, many in Africa, Asia, and Latin America struggled to gain access to them. Pharmaceutical companies, backed by patent protections and driven by profit, refused to waive intellectual-property rights despite global calls to do so, effectively putting corporate interests over human lives. As a result, by mid-2021, more than 85 per cent of COVID-19 vaccines administered worldwide had been in high- and upper-middle-income countries. This is a stark reminder of how global health systems can replicate colonial hierarchies under the banner of innovation and market efficiency.

Economic structures continue to reflect imperial dynamics through debt dependency, extractive trade relationships and unequal participation in financial institutions. Many developing countries are trapped in cycles of debt repayment to multilateral lenders like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, whose conditional loans often dictate domestic policy and constrain sovereignty. Additionally, global value chains are still skewed in favour of wealthier countries: raw materials are extracted from the Global South, processed in the Global North and sold back to the Global South at a premium. Meanwhile, poorer countries are left with minimal value capture and environmental degradation. These modern economic arrangements mirror colonial trade patterns with wealth flowing outward and vulnerability internalized. The World Trade Organization’s 2022 ruling that Indonesia’s ban on the export of raw nickel was a violation of its rules is a clear example of this continued colonial practice, contradicting Resolution 1803 of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1962 on ‘Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources’, which affirms the right of peoples and countries to their own natural wealth.

The European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) is another example of the continued regulatory imperialism of Western powers. Framed as an environmental-protection measure, it imposes unilateral standards on countries well beyond the EU’s borders. Under it, producers of commodities predominantly found in the Global South – such as palm oil, cocoa, coffee, soy and rubber – must comply with stringent traceability and deforestation-free criteria to access the EU market. With the directive, the EU seeks to exert control over the agricultural and land-use practices of developing countries, without offering them sufficient support for compliance. The EUDR effectively excludes smallholder farmers from the EU’s supply chains and undermines national sovereignty, particularly because its standards are set without mutual consultation or recognition of local development needs. In effect, the EU externalises its environmental agenda onto producers in the Global South,

reasserting an unequal power dynamic in the name of sustainability.

Finally, digital colonialism is emerging as a new frontier of power imbalance. Major technology firms, mostly headquartered in the Global North, control much of the world's data infrastructure, digital platforms and AI development. In many African and Southeast Asian countries, these platforms dominate public communication, finance and even education, without corresponding regulatory oversight or economic return. Meanwhile, data from the Global South is stored and monetised abroad, sidelining local digital sovereignty.

As we recognise the myriad global injustices still pervasive today, we come to the conclusion that the NAM's struggle to abolish colonialism and to advance meaningful independence and global equity remains very relevant. It thus must be the avenue for a new wave of decolonisation: one that extends beyond formal independence, whether through collective bargaining, policy coordination or advocacy for systemic reform. To do this, the NAM needs reinvention: a modernised agenda, a stronger institutional backbone and engagement with youth and civil society. It should align more with movements, not just governments, and invest in platforms such as climate-adaptation funds, technology-sharing hubs and media campaigns that spotlight Global South innovation and resilience. It must be able to adapt from political non-alignment into a form of cooperative sovereignty that emphasises fair trade, climate justice, digital rights and reform of outdated global institutions.

The NAM currently represents 120 countries, more than half the United Nations' membership. This strength in numbers has been utilised before: during the 2022–2023 sessions of the UNGA, many NAM members abstained from resolutions related to the Ukraine conflict, signalling their refusal to be drawn into confrontational alliances. Instead, they called for peace and de-escalation, in accordance with the movement's legacy. In the 2023 UNGA, Indonesia joined a coalition of NAM and G77 countries in advocating more transparent and inclusive international financial systems. NAM members also supported motions to increase concessional climate finance to low- and middle-income countries, highlighting the movement's potential to coordinate substantive policy demands. During the COVID-19 pandemic, several NAM countries, including Indonesia, coordinated through the COVAX platform to demand equitable vaccine distribution. While imperfect, this cooperation showed how NAM principles can be applied to current crises. The NAM can also channel the voices of those who are on the frontlines of climate change and rising sea levels, particularly small island developing states. It can be a platform for the Global South to coordinate stronger negotiating positions at UN climate change conferences, demanding fair finance, loss and damage compensation, and technology transfers.

Indonesia, as a founding member and leading voice in the NAM, has the credibility and the capacity to adopt a more proactive role and lead this reinvention. It is an influential actor in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the largest economy in the region, and its acceptance into BRICS adds to its strategic weight and expands its ability to amplify NAM goals. Indonesia has a unique opportunity to translate the movement's values into actionable policies within BRICS frameworks, from climate financing to digital cooperation to development-bank reform, and to ensure that BRICS+ expansion includes a Global South agenda aligned with NAM priorities.

As G20 chair in 2022, Indonesia pushed for inclusive green transitions and initiated the Just Energy Transition Partnership with support from developed countries. It can now advocate for a NAM Climate Adaptation Fund financed by Global South-led initiatives, including BRICS+ development instruments. Translating these proposals into NAM-backed platforms can amplify their impact.

Indonesia can promote the NAM as a vessel for coordinated diplomatic positions of the Global South at major summits like UN climate change conferences. More importantly, we should reframe the NAM not as a movement against other forces but as one that is pro-justice and pro-equity and that is actively shaping the future.

Finally, the revival of the NAM is about creating new opportunities for equitable cooperation. During the 2023 Hannover Messe, Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz voiced support for developing Indonesia's downstream rare-minerals industry to add value for countries of origin of raw materials for the semiconductor industry. This support shows how Germany can become a partner of the Global South on issues like climate, development and global reform. Through meaningful cooperation and partnership with Germany, Europe and other entities of the Global North, Indonesia can thus ensure that the NAM becomes not just a voice for the Global South but also a bridge toward a fairer international order. ↖



H.E. Arif Havas Oegroseno
is vice minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.



Replacing Unjust Multilateralism

With the old world order collapsing, Europe must build interest-driven alliances – with traditional Western partners, democratic actors in the Global South and even with systemic rivals like China.

The Bandung Conference was a demonstration of the self-confidence of the states of Africa and Asia vis-à-vis old and new colonial powers. There is no straight path from it to formats such as BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, but the roots of Global South cooperation were laid then.

This cooperation is changing the world. The BRICS countries make up 48 per cent of the world's population, have 39 per cent of its economic output, and produce 54 per cent of greenhouse-gas emissions. The 10 per cent of the world's population in the G7 countries account for less than a third of economic output. And we witness not only that the economic balance has shifted in favour of the Global South but also the collapse of the old world order.

Many believed that the end of the Cold War made the triumph of democratic capitalism unstoppable. Yet the unilateral era at the 'end of history' – with the United States as global power broker – came to an end in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. The end of real socialism also heralded the end of the post-1945 order based on the dominance of the US dollar, US military strength and international institutions such as the United Nations, the Bretton Woods bodies and NATO.

This system was dominated by states that defined themselves as the West – not a positive term, and certainly not an innocent one. The West's dominance was based on force. Europeans may forget this, but not the Global South.[1]

> **'Europe faces a fundamental decision: to become a pole in a multipolar world or to subordinate itself to one of the poles.'**

Today, the West has reached an end. The United States' overextension as a global power has long been apparent. Donald Trump has drawn conclusions from this. If Washington cannot be the dominant global power, it no longer wants to maintain order. Instead, Trump is focusing on disruption. That is why he is sealing off the US market with a tariff war. He tries to assert US interests by blackmailing weak countries and seeking deals with strong ones.

The result threatens to be an international order in which empires violently enforce their spheres of influence and the law of the strongest prevails over the rule of law. It would be an order more like that before the First World War than that after the Second World War.

This new order cannot be reduced to the contrast between autocracies and democracies. In Europe,

the conflict between the democratic European Union and imperialist-revisionist Russia is intensifying. However, it has become more than doubtful that the United States will continue to side with the EU. There is a global systemic rivalry between the states of democratic capitalism and the authoritarian state capitalism of China. Meanwhile, the democratic capitalism of the United States is turning into authoritarian oligarchism, making it a new systemic rival for a democratic Europe.

The new order is exacerbating problems. Worldwide, funds for combating poverty and hunger are being cut. Military spending is rising. The nuclear arms race is expanding. Various wars – from DR Congo to Sudan to Gaza and Ukraine – risk becoming endless. The ability to respond to global crises is declining, from the accelerating climate crisis to the plastic crisis. Global governance through the United Nations is massively weakened.

The new order is not to the advantage of Europe or the countries of the Global South. Both benefited from the rule of law and, despite its downsides, from globalisation. The rise of 800 million Chinese out of poverty is testimony to this, as is the development of India and Vietnam.

Europe faces a fundamental decision: to become a pole in a multipolar world or to subordinate itself to one of the poles? As its poor deal with Washington in the tariffs war shows, the EU still wavers between sovereignty and appeasing its old ally turning blackmailer.

But even a sovereign Europe needs partners. And alliances with democratic capitalist countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea are not sufficient. It also needs reliable political and economic relations with the democratic BRICS countries in particular, such as Brazil, India and South Africa.

Europe's approach in a multipolar world must be based on interests. China is a systemic rival for the EU, and poses a military challenge, at least for its neighbours. Economically, however, Europe is closer to China and India today than to Russia and the United States. Like it, China and India have an interest in regulated access to markets. Much of Russian and US political power is based on their position in the fossil-fuel markets. China, Europe and India have a massive interest in freeing themselves from this dependence by accelerating investment in renewables and climate protection.

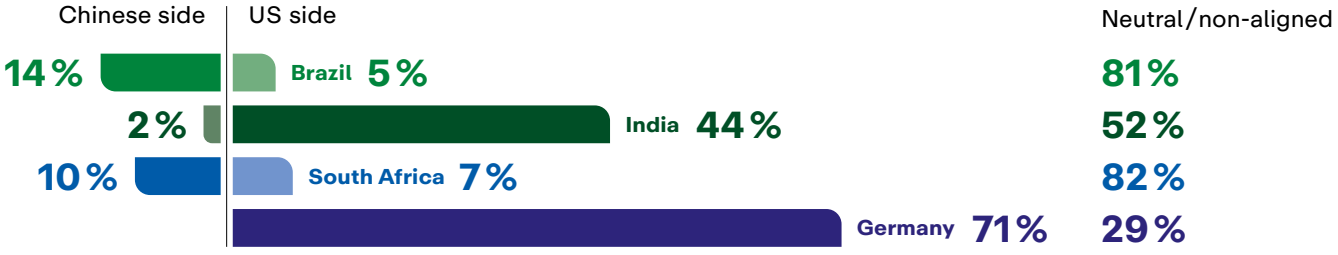
So there are good reasons for Europe to cooperate even with difficult systemic rivals such as China, because this reduces its vulnerability to blackmail by the new systemic rival across the Atlantic.

Bandung took place in a world of unjust multilateralism. It is not in the interests of Europe or the Global South today to replace this with the law of the strongest. In a multipolar world, complex, interest-driven pluralistic alliances are needed to resolve conflicts of interest in a rule-based manner. Europe must face up to this to fulfil all societies' claim to prosperity and to overcome global challenges such as the climate crisis. ↖



Jürgen Trittin
is a former German minister for the environment and longtime member of parliament for Alliance 90/The Greens as well as former co-chair of their parliamentary group.

How should your country position itself amid growing Chinese-US rivalry?



The survey was commissioned by Körber-Stiftung and conducted by Verian Germany among experts in Brazil, Germany, India and South Africa between 15 October and 2 December 2024 for the Emerging Middle Powers Report 2025. ISSN: 3052–2455.

(Mis)remembering Bandung at 70

Why today's invocations of Bandung reveal more about the present than the past.

The memory of the Bandung Conference in 1955 still provides inspiration to politicians, diplomats, scholars, journalists and artists alike. This year's many commemorations across the globe attest to that. Given the shifting contours of international forums today, and the formation of new groups and the expansion of old ones, it is no surprise that many of them should seek to lay claim to the legacy of the Bandung Spirit. But as Indian journalist Godfrey Jansen famously remarked in his 1966 magnum opus on Afro-Asianism: 'two conferences were held at Bandung in April 1955. One was the real conference, about which not very much is known. The other was quite a different conference, a crystallisation of what people had wanted to believe had happened which, as a myth, took on reality in the Bandung Principles and, later, in the Bandung Spirit.'[1] To Jansen, writing ten years after the conference and months after the attempt to convene a second one in Algiers had been called off, the Bandung Spirit had taken on a life of its own – one that was pushing the 'real' Bandung out of memory.

No straight lines can be drawn from the configuration of Asian and African states that gathered in 1955 to any international institutions past, present or emerging. Imagined lines – the one that runs from Bandung to Belgrade and the Non-Aligned Movement chief among them – do more than misrepresent the world leaders that convened in the Gedung Merdeka[2] 70 years ago. They risk eclipsing some of the lessons that can be drawn from the actual Bandung Conference. This invites the question of whether the world this year is commemorating the conference or its spirit.

The two are not as easily separated as one might think, not even for Jansen as a contemporary observer. Ironically, Jansen's career trajectory reads as emblematic of the Bandung era: he attended most of the Afro-Asian conferences of which he wrote, either as a journalist or as part of India's formal delegation, and he was eventually posted to Cairo, the United Nations, Jakarta, Istanbul and Beirut as correspondent for India's *National Herald*, a newspaper founded by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1938. Political



Indonesia's President Sukarno in Belgrade at the 1961 Non-Aligned Conference.

journalism from those locations was highly sought after in India at the time because the Bandung Conference had recalibrated diplomatic tradition to fit a decolonising world. It caused a proliferation of conferences and collaborations across Afro-Asia, connecting not only state leaders but also intellectuals, artists, peace workers and many others.

Upon his return to Delhi from Bandung, Nehru told the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's parliament) that the conference had 'proclaimed to the world the capacity of the new nations of Asia and Africa for practical idealism' and was 'part of a great movement of human history.'[3] Thus, the conference's own participants immediately placed the focus on its symbolic value rather than on its direct outcomes. Even Jansen, otherwise quick to draw attention to the political fault lines in Afro-Asian collaboration, grudgingly admitted Bandung's significance in that sense. So, perhaps the real question we should ask is: where do the legacies of the Bandung Conference and the Bandung Spirit converge in a way that is meaningful for the world, today?

Somewhat counterintuitively, Bandung was already being commemorated before it was held. Eleven days before it opened, another massive conference convened in New Delhi that saw itself as an expression of the Bandung Spirit, before the Bandung Conference had even had a chance to live up to that expectation. The world press shortened its rather convoluted title of Conference of Asian Countries on the Relaxation of International Tensions to the Conference of Asian Countries, which brought it closer to the billing of the Bandung Conference as the Asian-African Conference. The *Bombay Chronicle* called the Delhi conference an 'eve-of-Bandung meeting.' On that occasion, Maulana Bhashani of the Awami League[4] in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) said that he expected Bandung to deliver a 'united declaration of the countries of Asia and Africa', and that it could 'become a very valuable contribution to the advance of civilization in the whole world.'[5]

'Bandung was already being commemorated before it was held. Eleven days before it opened, another massive conference convened in New Delhi that saw itself as an expression of the Bandung Spirit, before the Bandung Conference had even had a chance to live up to that expectation.'

Given these high expectations, it is also worth looking at the political lineages in which the convenors of the Bandung Conference placed themselves. For this, one must shift the focus from the often-invoked Bandung Principles to the beginning of the conference, when the conveners' vision for the event was still unmarred by the realities of reconciling the different interests of a diverse group of nation-states. When Indonesia's President Sukarno took to the stage on 18 April 1955 to deliver the opening address of the conference, he started with a commemoration. He recalled the 1927 Conference of the League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression in Brussels, which some of the Bandung delegates had attended, most notably Nehru and Indonesia's Vice-President Mohammed Hatta. Sukarno said he considered the Brussels conference an important predecessor to Bandung, but he highlighted a key difference: 'That 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.'[6] That necessity was the fact that colonial authorities would not allow a conference that intended to connect anticolonial movements from around the world to be held within their jurisdictions. Belgium, notwithstanding the fact that it too was a colonial power, allowed the conference to take place in Brussels on the condition that it would not discuss Congo.



Asia Afrika Monument, Bandung, Indonesia.

In 1955, Sukarno said: 'our nations are colonies no more … we are again masters in our own house. We do not need to go to other continents to confer.' At Bandung, the fact that the independent powers of Asia and Africa were conferring without the mediation of others was key. This was not just a point of pride for the leaders of these recently decolonised nations; it was also a point of concern for Britain and the United States: media and intelligence records attest to nervousness at their lack of control over the proceedings in Bandung.

Those who had gathered in the Gedung Merdeka soon found that they themselves had little control over who got to claim the Bandung Spirit. The conference's legacy became increasingly contested in subsequent years. When the first Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference was convened in Cairo in 1957 with the support of the Egyptian government of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, these tensions came to a head. There was more overlap of the organising committees of the 1955 Delhi conference with the conference in Cairo, than with

anyone involved in Bandung, but Nasser's highly visible participation in the latter two events blurred the lines. As Egypt's Minister of State Anwar Sadat declared: 'this peoples' conference of ours meets partly in honour of the spirit of Bandung, and as a reminder of the principles and ideals it stands for, and partly to push it a step forward.'[7] That step forward included a much more militant stance on anti-imperialism and a broader definition of what imperialism entailed. This caused some to speak of a 'distortion' or even 'exploitation' of the Bandung Spirit.[8]

None of these contestations diminishes the significance of the Bandung Conference. If anything, they confirm it. But the impulse to define new international institutions in reference to Bandung did cause distortions in the memory of the actual Bandung. As the conference receded further into the past and its half-century came into view, commemorations placed in Bandung world leaders who had been nowhere near it. Also, and directly in conflict with the intentions of the conveners of the conference, they placed statesmen at Bandung who hailed from countries outside Africa and Asia. Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah is an oft-cited example of the former; Cuba's Fidel Castro and Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito are examples of the latter. This has much to do with the 'imagined line' between Bandung and the Non-Aligned Movement (although it should be noted that Castro did not attend the 1961 Belgrade conference either). American political scientist Robert Vitalis has called these distortions 'the Paul Revere's ride of our postcolonial age' – a romanticised retelling that gradually eclipsed knowledge of an historical event.[9]

> **'The Bandung Conference has become a Rorschach test. The ways in which it has been commemorated in decades past is more indicative of trends in foreign policy at the time of commemoration than of the conference itself.'**

In short, the Bandung Conference has become a Rorschach test. The ways in which it has been commemorated in decades past is more indicative of trends in foreign policy at the time of commemoration than of the conference itself. As shown above, this was already the case in Bandung's immediate aftermath. As the Non-Aligned Movement crested in the 1970s, non-alignment was read back into Bandung. At 50, new stress was placed on Bandung as a precedent for economic and diplomatic cooperation across the Global South. And, as new movements wrestled with the more enduring and under-recognised consequences of colonialism in the 21st century, Bandung's emancipatory potential moved to the forefront. This is not without basis in historical reality. Non-alignment was discussed at Bandung (and advocated by, among others, Nehru), even if many of the countries represented were resolutely aligned. And Bandung's emancipatory significance as the first official gathering of the leaders of decolonised African and Asian States extended far beyond the Gedung Merdeka and captured the heart of many, from ordinary citizens in the streets of Java to public figures like the novelist Richard Wright and the singer Paul Robeson in the United States.[10]

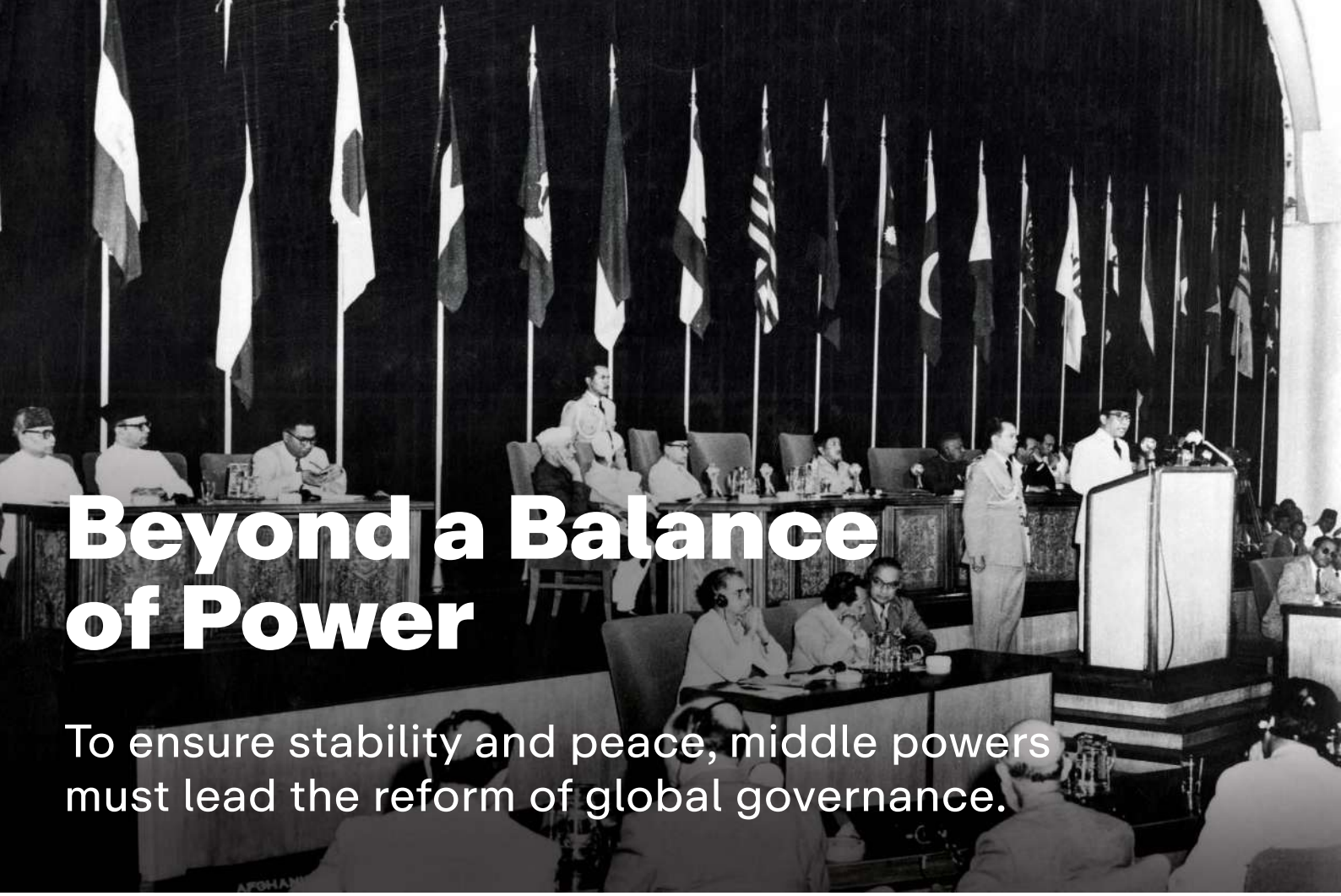
These two lines – Bandung's emancipatory value and its insistence on Africa and Asia conducting their affairs autonomously, especially the preservation of peace – do intersect. Returning one final time to Godfrey Jansen: his assertion that 'Bandung's greatest significance is to be found in the fact that it was held at all' is far too limited and deserving of further qualification.

As noted, Sukarno placed the Bandung Conference in a longer tradition of anticolonial organising. In his opening address, he also begged the delegates to 'not think of colonialism only in the classic form … colonialism also has its modern dress.' He urged them to 'keep our eyes firmly on the future.'[11] That future included cases of unfulfilled self-determination. This was clear not just in the formulation of the Bandung Principles but also in the way the conference was embedded in the city of Bandung. While the conference was purely official and nationalist movements were not formally invited, representatives from, among others, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and the African National Congress in South Africa, were provided with accommodation during the conference and were able to confer with their counterparts outside of the formal proceedings.[12]

Many possible futures convened in Bandung, united by a desire for the Afro-Asian region to meet autonomously and conduct its own affairs. Bandung's symbolic value in that regard was not a Bandung Spirit that took on a life of its own outside the control of the conference participants. Quite the opposite: the Bandung Spirit was intentionally encouraged and materially supported by those who gathered in the Gedung Merdeka in 1955. In that sense, at least, the Bandung Conference and the Bandung Spirit converge. ↖



Carolien Stolte
is associate professor of history at the institute for history at Leiden University.



Beyond a Balance of Power

To ensure stability and peace, middle powers must lead the reform of global governance.

Inside Bandung's 'Merdeka' building as President Sukarno of Indonesia opens the Afro-Asian Conference, 1955.

The post-Second World War order was premised on two things: first, that the victors would share the spoils and prevent another global conflict by managing their competition in a balance of power between them; and second, a reciprocal respect for their spheres of influence. In the minds of the Second World War victors, the rest of the world – mostly developing countries slowly emerging from colonialism – was initially considered part of this scheme, until their growing number gradually expanded their footprint on the global landscape.

Balances of power are however never static; the spheres of influence were violated and the number of countries outside these two blocs increased dramatically. As a result, the world order became inherently unstable and the norms promoted by the Second World War victors and later championed by what is now the Global South were undermined. This has disrupted multilateralism and the concept of universality.

The United States believes it bears the greatest burden in terms of the world's security, politics and economy. China and Russia are wary that the West seeks to impose a liberal orientation on everyone. Developing countries assert that industrialised ones have accelerated development and exploited natural resources, harming the environment, and unjustifiably impose measures on them at the expense of their aspirations.

An international paradigm that reflects contemporary realities, along with reforms to international procedures that create more equitable conditions, is essential for ensuring stability, security and peace in today's complex, fast-paced and multifaceted international system.

Reform is challenging but not impossible. The international system has undergone significant changes in the past, often with the support of a broad swathe of the international community. The most important examples are the establishment of the League of Nations following the First World War and the founding of the United Nations in 1945. These milestones paved the way for numerous important agreements: among great powers on strategic arms control, at the global level on weapons of mass destruction and across various areas of international economics. The common element and decisive factor behind these successes was a shared concept of a balance of interests that resonated with and united the vast majority of the international community.

Achieving such a balance today can seem daunting, especially given the diverse interests within the Global South. However, this is not an insurmountable obstacle. The countries of the Global South will inevitably have varied immediate interests, which cannot and should not be ignored. Yet, just as the leaders at the Bandung Conference in 1955, despite their diverse interests and priorities, found wide-ranging common interests on strategic goals such as equitable relations, sovereign equality and independence, a strategic, long-sighted approach is essential today.

In this context, Bandung stands as a pivotal example of how unity can emerge from diversity. From it emerged a powerful vision: a world where former colonies could assert their political and economic independence without becoming entangled in the ideological and military rivalries of the Cold War. The ten principles of Bandung – emphasizing sovereignty, mutual respect, non-aggression and peaceful coexistence – formed the guiding philosophy for what would later evolve into the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

‘In this context, Bandung stands as a pivotal example of how unity can emerge from diversity. From it emerged a powerful vision: a world where former colonies could assert their political and economic independence without becoming entangled in the ideological and military rivalries of the Cold War.’

The Bandung spirit found its most formal expression in 1961 when the NAM was officially established. Under the leadership of figures such as Yugoslavia’s Josip Broz Tito, India’s Jawaharlal Nehru, Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah and Indonesia’s Sukarno, it sought to provide a third path between the two Cold War superpowers. In the 1960s and 1970s, the NAM expanded rapidly as many newly independent countries joined its ranks.

Over the decades, the NAM has had significant achievements:

- It was instrumental in championing decolonisation and supporting independence movements in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, ensuring that colonialism was delegitimised on the world stage.
- It highlighted the inequalities in global trade and finance, and it advocated a just economic order through platforms like the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the demand for a New International Economic Order.
- It played a pivotal role in rallying international support against the apartheid regime in South Africa, leading to sanctions and diplomatic pressure that ultimately contributed to its downfall.
- It strengthened and facilitated closer cooperation between developing nations, leading to initiatives like BRICS, the G77 and regional groupings aimed at reducing dependence on Western economies.
- It resisted imperialism and consistently opposed foreign military interventions and unilateral actions that threatened the sovereignty of states, from Africa to Latin America and the Middle East.

Yet, challenges persist. The world today is marked by deep inequalities: economic disparities, climate injustice and geopolitical tensions and active conflicts that disproportionately affect the developing world. Many countries remain on the margins of global decision-making while many of the institutions established in the 20th century have failed to adapt to the evolving realities of the 21st century. Many countries, particularly developing ones, have frequently called for the reform of intergovernmental institutions to align them with contemporary international realities in a just and more equitable manner.

One of the challenges is that reform will not be credible unless it addresses the privileged position of developed countries in international forums. This includes the over-representation of Europe among the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and other bodies, and the fact that, in the absence of accountability, the positions of almost all such members are fraught with duplicity in the application of standards.

Realistically, the onus for creative initiative and resolute determination falls on the Global South and medium size or medium power countries. They could address these challenges in the format of an inclusive steering group, comprising two countries from each continent of the South from Africa, Asia and Latin America. The first step of the steering group would be to agree on the foundations, mechanisms and priorities before opening the door to other countries’ participation.

The second step would be to clarify the goals and priorities, including creating a multilateral system with better representation and performance. This effort would aim to reform and to restructure, rather than to dismantle, the international system, especially the United Nations and its institutions. These organisations should remain the foundation of any reformed system.

The priority should be to restructure intergovernmental organisations to ensure more equitable decision-making in them, notably by:

- Developing further the UN Security Council and international organisation council membership.
- Representing the international community better in terms of the permanent and non-permanent members of governing bodies of international organisations.

- Curtailing the misuse of veto or blocking powers by specifying how many times states can use these each year and/or the issues or circumstances in which they can be used.

The third step would be to consult with countries that support multilateralism in the Global East, West, North and South regarding the principles and objectives, in order to expand the international consensus and support for a proposal to be submitted to the UN Security Council and other international organisations.

> **'It is time for a new world order that is just, inclusive and reflective of all voices. In this pursuit, the middle powers and the Global South must take the lead within the format of the steering group.'**

It is time for a new world order that is just, inclusive and reflective of all voices. In this pursuit, the middle powers and the Global South must take the lead within the format of the steering group. Global South countries at the Bandung Conference already affirmed that they aspire to a world where no country is treated as a mere spectator in global governance, and where development is not dictated by a few but driven by the collective aspirations of all. We call for reforms in international financial institutions to serve the needs of developing countries and to end cycles of dependency. We demand a multilateral system that prioritises equity and inclusivity, in which trade agreements, climate policies and technological advances benefit the many, not just the few. The Global South must expand to include like-minded partners for international cooperation while renewing its commitment to the Bandung Spirit and pushing for a new, more equitable world order. Urgent reform of the international institutions established after the Second World War – such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank – is required to reflect today's global realities.

An invigorated Global South must unite in advocating:
- Fairer trade policies that do not disadvantage developing countries.
- Debt restructuring and financial sovereignty to ensure that countries are not trapped in cycles of debt dependence.
- Having a stronger voice in global governance, including permanent representation for Africa and Latin America in the UN Security Council.
- Climate justice with industrialised countries taking responsibility for their historical emissions and providing financial and technological support for sustainable development in the Global South.

Seven decades ago, the leaders meeting in Bandung dared to dream of a world free from colonial domination and external control. Today, the Global South countries must once again bring forward that dream, based on balancing the interests of states as well as the interdependence of the global and national levels. We should pursue this vision, which is within our grasp, where justice, equality and true independence define the global order. We can deepen our partnerships, strengthen our regional alliances and global cooperation by investing in our own capacities. We can collaborate on technological progress, build resilient economies and promote peace and diplomacy.

Turning this vision into reality will require more than aspiration; it demands strategic collective action by the Global South. Its leverage to compel great powers to accept these reforms is in its collective weight, be that in critical resources, market share and consequently political weight.

The widest coalitions of the Global South and middle power countries will be useful. Their strength is in inclusivity and coalition building at the widest possible level, even of ad hoc arrangements of the willing and beyond formal groupings, and their strongest leverage is proactive engagement.

The Global South is not just a bloc of emerging countries but rather a force for change, a collective that can shape the course of history. Let us build a world where sovereignty is respected, where economies grow without exploitation and where peace is not dictated by the powerful but co-created by all countries. The future belongs to those who dare to shape it. Let us embrace this challenge together. ↖



Nabil Fahmy
is former minister of foreign affairs of Egypt and dean emeritus of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo.

The Ghost of Bandung

Seventy years on, Bandung's founding ideals clash with the cynical reality of today's international relations.

April 2025 marked the 70th anniversary of the Asian-African Conference at Bandung, Indonesia. It was one among several meetings between the 1940s and 1960s that created, agreed upon and disseminated concepts such as non-alignment and the Third World. These conveyed the intention of participating countries to carve a path that rejected becoming part of or aligning with the Soviet and Western blocs. The leaders who met in Bandung sought to maintain their countries' hard-won independence, to foster their autonomy and to develop their agency in the emerging Cold War.

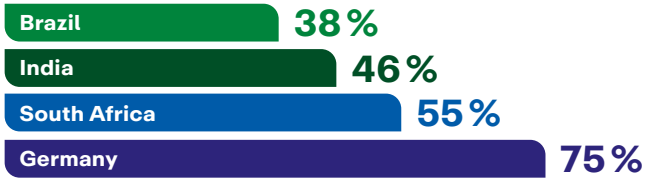
These concepts have renewed relevance today. What used to be called the Third World now is often described as the Global South. Instead of non-alignment, middle powers from the Global South advocate and seek multi-alignment. What are the similarities and the differences between then and now? And how does this affect how the West, and in particular Europe, should relate to these countries?

At Bandung, countries from Africa and Asia put forward a fundamental critique of the inequality and unrepresentativeness of the global order at the time. They strived to gain or to consolidate their independence after decades of colonialism, and rejected the idea of being put in the straitjacket of the new bipolar Cold War order. Likewise today, countries from the Global South strongly oppose binary approaches to international order, including the democracy-autocracy dichotomy and the idea that countries have to choose between the Global West and Global East.

In 1955, the countries represented at Bandung claimed new forms of agency in international relations. The very fact that this and other conferences took place outside Europe and featured non-Western leaders signalled a drive to find new forms of collective advocacy. Today too, non-Western middle powers demand greater voice in global politics, particularly regarding regional affairs, along with enhanced status and role on the global stage. Refusing to align themselves with China, Europe, Russia or the United States, they have hedged and leveraged their multi-alignment with all to extract benefits and to carve out a place for themselves. Middle powers like Saudi Arabia and Turkey have been active in diplomacy and mediation over the war in Ukraine. South Africa initiated the genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over its actions in Gaza, which has significantly redefined the narrative of this war.

However, the differences between past and present are even more striking. In Bandung, leaders of several countries that had recently freed themselves from colonial oppression met to discover what bound them together, to escape great-power confrontation and to advance cooperation. Today, the threat of colonialism is back with a vengeance, as Russia seeks to conquer Ukraine and the United States advances territorial claims on Canada and Greenland. But, while rediscovering and reinterpreting the principles and the spirit of Bandung is needed, there is little movement in this direction in the Global West, East or, in fact, South. Cynicism, transactionalism and parochialism are the currency everywhere. The Global West and East bear greater responsibility, being the prime culprits of violations. But the middle powers from the Global South are hardly more virtuous, often standing on the sidelines and extracting gains from the mayhem.

Sanctions should be used as a tool to change a country's behaviour, say experts in ...



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The International Court of Justice before the genocide case against Israel, filed by South Africa.

The Bandung Conference agreed on ten principles that affirmed respect for human rights, sovereignty, territorial integrity, the equality of all races and countries, the right to self-defence individually or collectively in line with the United Nations Charter, and the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means; and that rejected aggression and the use of force against the independence and territorial integrity of countries, interference in internal affairs, and collective defence aimed at serving the interests of major powers. These principles are at the core of international law and the multilateral system, starting with the United Nations Charter, that has been built since the Second World War.

The systematic violation of these principles in the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, including in Gaza and Iran, suggests that international law and multilateralism are in tatters. At the same time, though, the violence and chaos the world is experiencing mean that reaffirming and recommitting to those principles is as relevant as ever.

Tragically, there is no hope or expectation that the United States under President Donald Trump will express any sympathy for, support for, or adherence to international law and anything resembling the Bandung Principles. While over the last decades it violated international norms and rules in many instances, Washington was also at the forefront of the construction of the order based on multilateral institutions and international law. Under Trump, the United States has turned into the primary revisionist player in the international system. Having convinced itself that this order is not in its interest, it is now intent on destroying it, rather than occasionally bending and violating the rules.

The rest of the West, starting with Europe, should stick with and recommit to these norms. It is more comfortable with some than with others, though. It would subscribe wholeheartedly, at least in principle, to human rights, sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality, non-aggression, self-defence and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. It would also agree that collective defence, notably through NATO, should be understood as an extension and application of self-defence, rather than as a means of pursuing great-power interests. When it comes to these norms the archetypical problem is double standards, of which Europe has provided shocking evidence by supporting them with regard to Russia's invasion of Ukraine while unabashedly being complicit in their violation in Israel's war in Gaza and its attacks, alongside the United States, on Iran.

> **'Countries in the Global South generally subscribe to the Bandung Principles as much today as before. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they have upheld non-alignment. However, they struggle to rediscover the more elusive yet just as important Bandung Spirit.'**

Moreover, European liberal democracies would also struggle with the notion of non-interference in the internal affairs of countries. There is tension between countries being free to choose the nature

of their political system and the respect for human rights that should trigger a response by all. Europe's relations with the Global South, and in particular with Africa, is rife with references to mutual respect and equal partnership, but its stated adherence to human rights has been used to lecture countries about their laws, rules and governance practices. There is also a blurry line separating the rule of law conditionality embedded internally in groupings like the EU and the belief that political conditionality should guide trade, development or security policies externally. If the EU is founded on principles such as democracy, human rights and minority rights, it can hardly discard them altogether in its external action. But few would dispute that the liberal West can no longer preach democracy to the rest of the world as it once did – because rights and freedoms are often violated in it, because of blatant double standards and because it no longer wields the power abroad that it once did. The days of external coercion aimed at shaping other countries' political systems, all the way down to bombing them into democracy, were wrong and gone.

Countries in the Global South generally subscribe to the Bandung Principles as much today as before. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they have upheld non-alignment. However, they struggle to rediscover the more elusive yet just as important Bandung Spirit. This aimed at conveying a sense of agency and strategic autonomy for pursuing the agreed principles. Today, much of that spirit is lost. Underpinning multi-alignment – the present-day variant of non-alignment – is a sense of opportunism, with each country seeking to promote its self-interest while resisting committing to and sticking their neck out for anything or anyone greater than themselves.

This does not mean that countries in the Global South refuse to take a principled stance. For example, many of them consistently do so at the UN General Assembly. And they do so not only when this fits their worldview, such as condemning Israel's violations of international law; they have also taken uncomfortable positions like denouncing Russia's war against Ukraine. In this respect, many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America are not as guilty as some countries in the West of hypocrisy and double standards.

However, Global South countries have fallen short on consistent action. Often with good reason, they are critical of sanctions and military support, presenting these as antitheses of diplomacy rather than as instruments that can support it. To back their argument, they can point to alternative forms of action, such as South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the ICJ. However, they have shied away from purposeful action, be it sanctions or recourse to international tribunals, when the target would be a friend or partner, like Russia. In this respect, Global South countries have fallen into the same double-standards trap they rightly criticize the Global North for. Both tend to act as though crimes are always committed by adversaries and never by friends.

The Global South's criticism of the Global North would be far more powerful if backed by alternative and consistent forms of action in support of the principles it subscribes to. Without this, the idea of non-aligned solidarity becomes empty or a contradiction in terms. Worst of all, it can end up in appeasement and complicity. It is only by Global South countries rediscovering the positive and purposeful connotation of non-alignment that the Bandung Spirit can live again and inspire the world.

> **'Europe must develop a principled and structured partnership with the Global South based on efforts to defend the international institutions undergoing frontal attack by the United States, including courts and UN agencies.'**

Europe too – at best abandoned and at worst in the crosshairs of its once ally across the Atlantic – must redouble its effort to engage countries in the Global South. This is essential in a multipolar world in which the West, less still the rest of the West without the United States, no longer calls the shots. Without a partnership with the Global South, Europe will not be able to protect or to promote any of its interests. However, it should not only engage through sectoral partnerships on the likes of energy and infrastructure, as well as in new trade agreements. Important as these may be, especially as the international trade system is being dismantled by Washington, this is insufficient. Europe must develop a principled and structured partnership with the Global South based on efforts to defend the international institutions undergoing frontal attack by the United States, including courts and UN agencies. As US aid is being slashed and Europeans fail to step up to fill the void, Europe and the Global South should collaborate on reshaping the global aid architecture. Such a partnership with the Global South would not be one in which European principles are hypocritically preached or imposed, but one in which a shared commitment to the basics of international law is reaffirmed and defended together. ↖



Nathalie Tocci
is the director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali, an honorary professor at the University of Tübingen, an adjunct professor at the European University Institute and a fellow at the Institute for Human Science.

Selective Solidarity

Western self-recrimination and Southern self-elevation in the shadow of Bandung.

Bandung was a celebration of the postcolonial era: for the first time, over 300 delegates from former colonies represented independent states, demonstrating their ability to act as well as their will to participate in shaping a new world order.

In today's collective memory, Bandung stands for the imagination of postcolonial solidarity – even if in opposition to the historical realities of profound differences among these countries. In 1955, these differences crystallised around two questions: Should the postcolonial spirit unfold primarily in opposition to the European colonial powers or also against Soviet imperialism? And was the state of Israel, founded only a few years earlier, considered a victim of antisemitism and the Holocaust or a white settler colony and thus as a continuation of colonialism? As a concession to the Arab states, the organisers of Bandung excluded it, establishing the unambiguous narrative of Israel as perpetrator and the Palestinians as victims.

> **'What remains unexamined are their own blind spots in their support for the Palestinians and their widespread distancing from Russia's war in Ukraine, which miss the fundamental differences between the two conflicts.'**

This perspective remains central even 70 years after Bandung. In unison, representatives of the Global South level the accusation of double standards against the West, which is alleged to condemn Russia's violence in Ukraine while supporting Israel's 'genocide' in Gaza. What remains unexamined are their own blind spots in their support for the Palestinians and their widespread distancing from Russia's war in Ukraine, which miss the fundamental differences between the two conflicts. Russia is waging a war of aggression in Ukraine, whereas Israel is responding to a terrorist attack whose message to Israel was unequivocal: you will never live in safety! Russia violates Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and thereby the second Bandung principle while Hamas places itself outside humanitarian principles altogether.

The double standards of the Global South – a term that in itself represents an invalid generalisation – illustrate that the dichotomy of perpetrators and victims, and of Western self-recrimination and Southern self-elevation, leads nowhere, just as much as moralising certainties do. In international politics, there are no clear-cut solutions and no definitive conditions, only the necessity of weighing up and of tolerating ambiguity.

> **'In international politics, there are no clear-cut solutions and no definitive conditions, only the necessity of weighing up and of tolerating ambiguity.'**

This, however, is not to advocate arbitrariness. There is one common denominator in international politics, at least as a norm: the integrity of sovereign states based on the preservation of fundamental human rights. In it one can still recognise the Bandung Spirit, which is above all based on the Charter of the United Nations. If there is such a thing as a claim to global universalism, there it is – but without broad-brush ascriptions of labels as historical perpetrators and victims. ↖

A longer version of this article was published in German in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, following his participation in Körber-Stiftung's Bandung Dialogue in April 2025.



Andreas Rödder
is a professor of modern history at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, and he is founder and director of the think tank Republik21.

Unfinished Business

How Indonesia is using its natural resources to challenge old dependencies and assert a new role in global supply chains.



As a country with abundant natural resources, Indonesia has adopted a nationalist policy to reduce its reliance on foreign technology, markets and capital. This approach has been a core part of its economic development since its independence and applied in several natural-resource sectors, including recent initiatives.

Indonesia has long heavily depended on the extraction of resources and export of commodities as a key feature of its economic development. This includes plantation and agricultural products like timber and palm oil as well as minerals such as coal, tin, copper and nickel. Relying on these commodities contributed to economic growth but did not reduce dependence on foreign markets, and it left Indonesia in a less prominent role in global supply chains. The country was mainly a supplier of raw materials while industrialisation made other countries more developed. Consequently, even after over 70 years of independence from colonial rule, Indonesia continues to import finished products and shows limited ability to develop its own industrial and manufacturing sectors that add value locally.

Since independence, Indonesia's policies surrounding the extraction and export of commodities have fluctuated and been adjusted. The combination of domestic political shifts and global political dynamics caused an alternation between openness and restriction. First, the country adopted more protectionist and nationalist policies shaped by the Bandung Spirit to eliminate the colonial legacy. This involved converting Dutch-owned companies into national enterprises, mainly in the plantation and agricultural sectors. By the end of President Sukarno's era, most of the natural-resources sectors had come under state control.

Change in domestic political power in the mid-1960s led to a more open stance, with foreign investors welcome as Indonesia adopted a pragmatic approach to economic development. It was not until about 20 years ago that the government introduced a new policy aimed at reducing the export of commodities. This was a response to changes in the global political environment with the increasing movement for a green transition to fight climate change. Indonesia viewed the increasing worldwide demand for green energy as an opportunity to strengthen its position in global supply chains and to support its domestic industries.

Resource nationalism refers to policies that aim to increase local ownership of land and resource industries or to promote localisation, while also strengthening the economic position of domestic companies against foreign entities by leveraging land and natural resources for industrialisation.[1] It is viewed as a government-led strategy that aims to gain greater control over natural resources, with a primary focus on industrialising the extraction sector. The main goal is to manage a country's



natural resources. Another key objective is to increase state ownership of strategic industries. This can include measures from minor regulatory adjustments that restrict foreign involvement and limit exports to conserve resources to renegotiating contracts with foreign firms on more favourable terms, and even to more politically sensitive and risky actions such as nationalising foreign companies. Ultimately, a resource-rich country pursues resource nationalism to secure economic gains by increasing ownership and control over extractive industries while maximizing domestic political and economic benefits through developmental spillovers.

In the late 2000s, Indonesia started adopting policies that can be seen as a form of resource nationalism. This began with the 2009 Law on the Mineral and Coal Mining Industries, which established requirements for processing raw minerals domestically to increase value added through local smelting facilities.[2] From 2009 to 2020, over 20 regulations were enacted to enforce this law, including local content obligations, which require companies to provide domestic employment and to use local goods and services. Another aim was to increase state control over resources through divestment by foreign firms and to restrict foreign influence. The 2018 divestment of Freeport Indonesia (a subsidiary of the US company Freeport-McMoRan) was a notable example of Indonesia's effort to take control.[3] The 2009 law was amended in 2020 to prohibit the export of more than 200 types of mineral ore.[4] This was driven by the view that multinational corporations had profited excessively, leaving local people with insufficient benefits; thus, resource control was seen as necessary to secure a fair share for the country.[5]

> **'Indonesia's resource nationalism can be seen as reflecting the Bandung Spirit, which prioritized national sovereigty and independence – core reasons for asserting control over natural resources and strategic sectors.'**

Resource nationalism remains a key feature of Indonesia's approach to extractive industries, although its implementation has been inconsistent due to internal and external pressures. Internal pressure arises from large businesses operating in the country delaying implementation and requesting exceptions. External pressures are exemplified by the challenges by the European Union through the World Trade Organization's dispute-settlement

An open-pit coal mine in Borneo, Indonesia, where excavators strip earth to access coal, illustrating the scale of resource extraction linked to Indonesia's resource nationalism.

mechanism, as the policy was perceived as violating Indonesia's international trade commitments.

To what extent does a current policy by a Global South country reflect the spirit established 70 years ago? The Bandung Spirit was formed during the Cold War, a period dominated by ideological and geopolitical rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, which shaped global politics around two blocs. Although today's world is mainly defined by a complex multipolar system, some global issues still bring to mind the motivations behind the 1955 Asian-African Conference. These encompass disparities in global relationships; conflicts over spheres of influence; access to resources, markets, and technology; and unequal participation in global governance structures.

> **'There should also be substantial domestic reforms to guarantee that resource nationalism policies benefit the broader population in developing countries, not just the elite.'**

Although the global landscape has evolved since the Bandung Conference, the underlying spirit from that event resonates today. Indonesia's resource nationalism can be seen as reflecting the Bandung Spirit, which prioritised national sovereignty and independence – core reasons for asserting control over natural resources and strategic sectors. While the original aim of Bandung was to foster economic cooperation and development among newly independent nations, resource nationalism is often a strategy to stimulate economic growth by capturing more resource rents. The conference sought to reduce dependency on superpowers and encourage South-South cooperation, and resource nationalism diminishes reliance on foreign companies. Resource nationalism also seeks to strengthen national autonomy and self-determination, which aligns with the Bandung Spirit. Furthermore, it ensures that the benefits from natural resources are shared primarily with the domestic population rather than foreign interests, echoing Bandung's emphasis on equitable resource distribution.

The Bandung Spirit has laid a solid foundation for developing countries in shaping and guiding their relationships with each other. It has also inspired domestic economic development policies, including in the form of resource nationalism, that countries like Indonesia have embraced. However, whether adopting resource nationalism will directly benefit the people remains uncertain. Limiting foreign control over natural resources does not necessarily bring prosperity for the broader population in developing countries. The extractive industry relies mainly on capital and technology provided by large enterprises. As a result, these policies have been criticised for potentially benefiting primarily large domestic and international companies. The focus on extraction is also criticised for worsening environmental degradation and harming local communities. Since domestic inequality gaps are not addressed by resource nationalist policies, adopting the Bandung Spirit as a guiding principle for economic development in relations with other countries cannot fully realise its ultimate goal of bringing prosperity to the people and becomes less meaningful. Therefore, there should also be substantial domestic reforms to guarantee that resource nationalism policies benefit the broader population in developing countries, not just the elite. Prioritizing a reduction in dependence on extraction and implementing serious measures to develop a more sustainable natural-resources sector are crucial to addressing the environmental degradation resulting from extraction.

In today's global political economy, developing countries confront cross-border challenges like climate-change adaptation and mitigation that transcend the North–South divide. To address these effectively, countries such as Indonesia must forge strategic partnerships within South-South cooperation and with Global North countries. Since transitioning to green energy in the Global South demands substantial financial aid, collaboration with the Global North is crucial. In 2022, Indonesia launched a Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) with an International Partners Group (IPG) during the G20 Summit in Bali, demonstrating how North-South cooperation can tackle urgent global issues. However, the United States withdrew as co-leader of the JETP earlier this year, prompting a reorganization of the IPG. Germany took over as co-leader, alongside Japan, promising to uphold the JETP's objectives. If the JETP fulfils its promises, Indonesia might avoid nationalist policies and instead strengthen its collaboration with dedicated countries supporting the partnership.

The JETP illustrates that, in order to effectively address cross-border challenges, especially climate change, countries such as Indonesia need to develop policies that meet their needs while also considering geopolitical dynamics. ↖



Poppy S. Winanti
is a professor of international relations at the Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Why Does Solidarity Fail?

Afro-Asian diplomacy once animated non-alignment. Its legacy offers lessons for shaping a more localised diplomacy today.

There are different ways in which international political solidarity occupies our imaginations and subsequent political theorisation. We may think of cosmopolitan and non-governmental initiatives, but we tend to focus on bilateral and multilateral diplomacy as well as international organisation-led arbitration and conflict resolution. The study of collective diplomacy at the UN has been at the centre of envisioning solidarity from its founding period, which overlapped with a period of intense decolonisation. When it comes to African and Asian states, or Global South ones more widely, there was a peak period when they were mobilised at the UN. Anxieties around forming and sustaining solidarity movements today, particularly in response to events such as the conflict in Palestine, can be assuaged through the study of previous attempts at such mobilisation. There is deep anguish today with a perceived ending of Bandung-style internationalism, but there already was a decline in Third World solidarity from the 1960s. A deeper exploration of what Afro-Asian diplomacy meant, and of its rise and fall, offers lessons for renewed attempts at collective action, such as for a reformed UN that privileges the specificities of local contexts.

Gaza has increased interest in solidarity movements unlike any other recent international conflict, due to the lack of action against Israel at the UN and other multilateral forums. The Global South has been criticised for abandoning anticolonial internationalism. There was an assumption that a state-led response, and also a people-led critique not dissimilar to the agitation from the 1960s, would happen after the Hamas-led attack on Israel in October 2023 turned into a war in Gaza, with the number of casualties exceeding the total from all the wars fought previously between Israel and Palestine. What is the source of this assumption? Why should Gaza have precipitated fellowship among states that have only moved away from consensus in the 80 years of the UN's existence?

More than the historical or contemporary crises in, say, Afghanistan, DR Congo or East Timor, Palestine has always been a site of confluence for multiple kinds of solidarity mobilisation. Anticolonial, socialist, feminist and internationalist agendas overlap there, and the politics of aspiration that once drove the integration of Africa and Asia in world politics are still applicable to Palestine as the largest unsettled political question of our times. The waves of decolonisation from the 1950s led to state- and nation-building in the Global South in a manner now simply unimaginable for Palestine. Consumed by their politico-economic integration in a system dominated by the Global North, the Global South countries neglected the Palestine question, to the extent that it has become a flashpoint that exposes the weaknesses of solidarity movements, whether South-South or between the Global South and the Global North.

> **'Gaza represents a particularly dismal failing of international cooperation over the better part of the last century – one that is more cumulative than exceptional.'**

While the Third World and the Bandung Spirit projected solidarity, they never translated this into a robust mandate on the Palestine question. Gaza represents a particularly dismal failing of international cooperation over the better part of the last century – one that is more cumulative than exceptional. Since the 1960s, Global South states have moved away from earlier versions of their anticolonial nationalism. Once large-scale decolonisation had been achieved and concretised through nation-building, there was an inevitable turn to the domestic strengthening of the state. An insular approach followed due to the political and economic exigencies of maintaining the sovereignty of new nation-states. Thus, the anticolonial model on which nations function when they are more nebulous in form fades away as they become states that are international political actors in their own right. The Global South fell short on addressing the Palestine question even at the Bandung Conference in 1955.

It should come as no surprise that it has historically mobilised selectively for particular objectives and within specific contexts, not all of which were internationalist. It is thus useful to study the Global South's solidarity-making and conduct during the early Cold War.

To craft an alternative and modern approach to internationalist solidarity, one can look to an earlier time when disparate movements coalesced. Afro-Asian diplomacy at the UN was a riposte to a Western idea of the liberal international order. But what exactly does Afro-Asianism at the organisation mean? Attempts to define how African and Asian countries have conducted multilateral diplomacy focus on decolonisation and their membership of the UN. An exploration of the meteoric rise of Afro-Asian diplomacy there up to its concretisation into the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 must begin with a discussion of the intellectual motivations and normative commitments of Afro-Asian collectiveness at the UN.

For India, liberal internationalism, especially in its institutionalised form at the UN, became associated with specific characteristics. Through decolonisation and non-alignment, New Delhi sought to widen and strengthen the post-war political order on which these were premised, contrary to the belief in the West that it would seek to overturn that order. In the early years of its UN membership, which coincided with the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru as its first prime minister and most prominent architect of foreign policy, India pushed for decolonisation and non-alignment with the superpowers. The movement for Afro-Asian collectiveness at the UN represented the peak of India's response to liberal internationalism and the crises from which a radical, critical new vision for world order emerged, including to the Cold War.

The imperialist foundations of the UN have been well analysed. Within a decade of its founding, it had veered from its promised internationalism. Some claimed that the weight of European history had come to bear so mightily on the post-war structure of international politics that there would be no escaping it. In particular, Americans were of the view that they had revised and updated Europe as an idea for the Third World to apply to their own political contexts as some sort of standard of civilisation. As decolonisation spread after the 1940s, the Western monopoly over global order became endangered and calls for change were met with consistent Western radicalised attacks from the Anglosphere, including on Nehruvian India's proposed vision for a broader engagement with international politics through Global South solidarity. The activities of the UN's new members from the Afro-Asian bloc led to growing fear in the West, which found the UN changing dramatically as seen in the large number of anticolonial resolutions.



India's Prime Minister Nehru and Egypt's Prime Minister Nasser receive bouquets after returning from the Bandung Conference.

The Second World (the Soviet Union and its socialist allies) extended its own brand of internationalism to decolonising Africa and Asia through material aid and ideological support. For Nehru and India, the UN was a space in which to calibrate Indian policies in line with those of other African and Asian nations, and to guard against the narcissistic triumphalism that would inevitably follow the British Empire. Furthermore, this new internationalist politics built on justice and peace was intended to broaden the scope of India's diplomacy. Asia and Afro-Asia represented Nehru's two modes of thinking. The struggle to give form and meaning to Asia had achieved immense significance in his mind, a struggle shared by other thinkers and peoples. India was to play a central role in the unmaking of the old Asianism and the making of the new Afro-Asianism. This took place at events such as the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 in New Delhi and the Bandung Conference in 1955. Afro-Asianism, as a composite of India's Asianist principles and Third World solidarities, sanctioned an internationalist politics that could be built on the critique of the UN's big powers.

'Non-alignment can rescue the UN again because it can offer a non-homogeneous, non-hierarchical, difference-based solidarity.'

But the anticolonialism that had comprised the foundation of this internationalist thought weakened with the transitions from Indian nationalism to Asian regionalism and from Asian regionalism to Afro-Asian internationalism. Mostly this was due to an unclear perspective in New Delhi on the extent of India's participation in Afro-Asian collectiveness. When it found itself unable to commit more fully to an expansive internationalist politics, India fell back into a more limited and comfortable Asianism, as noted in the retrospective observation of the Indian diplomat and leader Krishna Menon that for India Bandung was largely an Asian enterprise.

This failure at coalition politics is largely the consequence of India's positionality as an Asian state bound by the constraints of its statehood and under constant territorial siege following independence. This led to the decline of the expansive intellectual roots of the pre-independence internationalist era. By the end of the 1950s, and with the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement, institutionalised allyship turned out to be a poor substitute for the webs of solidarity. The UN represented the promise of fellowship, yet membership of the UN had not translated to a more transnational cosmopolitanism.

The view from New Delhi was that recusing itself from alliances would give India a place in the world while allowing it to take on internationalist commitments beyond its own national interests. This non-alignment was a way of grappling with contemporary politics, but also of thinking about world-making. Unfortunately, non-alignment has mostly faded into the background of nationalist politics. Musings on non-alignment for the present age often try to think of linkages with that of the 1950s or 1960s because its legacy and that of Bandung is steeped in nostalgia. This may be blinding us to the politics of the Global South today.

Furthermore, even though a new wave of attention to non-alignment may come from the Global South, it is arguably the UN that needs non-aligned solidarity. Afro-Asian non-aligned politics once rescued the UN from becoming an instrument of continued colonialism by other means. Non-alignment can rescue the UN again because it can offer a non-homogeneous, non-hierarchical, difference-based solidarity. States collaborate with whomever they choose to, in whichever capacity they want to. Could this influence how the Global South approaches intentional politics today? Historically, the most influential forms in which the Global South has exerted itself have been through mediatory diplomacy. What can we learn from the successes of Afro-Asian caucusing from the 1950s and 1960s? With states limiting their commitments to the UN, the ways in which the Global South bolstered it when it was in crisis earlier are useful to revisit.

There is much to be learnt from the diplomacy of African and Asian states in the mid 20th century. Notably, one way to influence a remodelling of the UN is to look outside institutional frameworks of international cooperation. Global South webs of interconnectedness were forged in spaces that were fluid, not controlled by states and created by the interplay of local political traditions. institutionalising these often led to their demise. Counterintuitively, one can imagine a diffused, ideational UN – one that privileges the specificities of local context. There have been calls for the regionalisation of conflict resolution, but a further project might be to sculpt a vision for a highly localised form of diplomacy – in small spaces, in small gatherings – that allows for more lateral movement between humanistic approaches to world politics and high-power realpolitik. ↖



Swapna Kona Nayudu is the author of *The Nehru Years – An International History of Indian Non-Alignment, (Cambridge University Press, 2025).*

A Fairer Future Through South-South and Triangular Cooperation

As the United Nations and the world navigate a period of fragmentation, revisiting Bandung's call for cooperation among equals offers a powerful path forward.

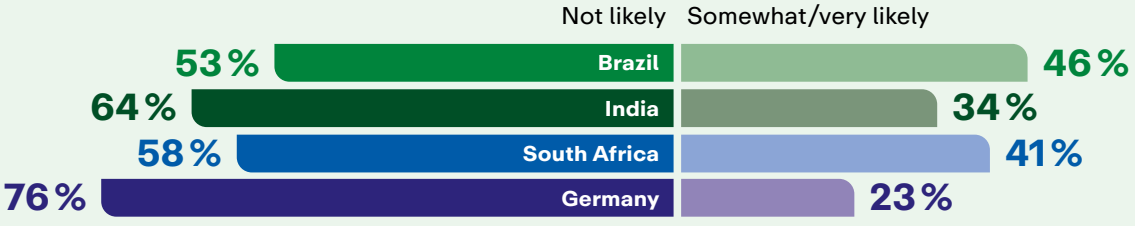
The gathering of 29 mostly newly independent African and Asian nations at the Bandung Conference in 1955 was more than a diplomatic event; it was a collective act of political courage. Their leaders sought to assert their sovereignty, to accelerate their development and to free their people from the gravitational pull of Cold War rivalries.

The ten Bandung Principles – grounded in sovereignty, equality, non-interference, peaceful dispute settlement and solidarity – went beyond moral declarations; they offered a practical roadmap for inclusive international cooperation. At its core, Bandung championed the United Nations Charter as the anchor of international law and diplomacy, affirming that, even in a polarised world, a universal multilateral platform was indispensable. The principles are present in many UN processes and regional action plans. Taking Bandung a step further, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, now offers clear targets and indicators, defined implementation mechanisms and accountability structures.

Today, as the UN marks its 80th anniversary alongside the 70th commemoration of Bandung, multilateralism is again under strain. Geopolitical rivalries, economic fragmentation and eroding trust between countries threaten to paralyse collective action. Yet paradoxically, our interdependence – in confronting the climate crisis, pandemics, digital disruption or inequality – has never been clearer. The current challenge is not whether we need global cooperation and new institutions, but how to renew and adapt cooperation for a world where states increasingly engage in flexible, diverse and mutually beneficial partnerships that bridge traditional geopolitical divisions. This pivotal moment calls us to revisit, and to recommit to, Bandung's legacy.

The ideals forged at Bandung did not remain abstract. Out of them emerged South-South and triangular cooperation, first as solidarity among newly independent states and later institutionalised across the multilateral system. Over time, South-South and triangular cooperation has evolved from a political aspiration into a practical development-cooperation partnership model, delivering

Experts in … are pessimistic about the likelihood of major reforms to make the United Nations fairer within the next five years.



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UN Secretary-General António Guterres addresses the opening of the 72nd United Nations General Assembly in New York.

demand-driven and context-specific development outcomes.

As highlighted in the Global Report on South-South and Triangular Cooperation 2025: Bridging Horizons and Continents[1] produced by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), this approach is now a key driver of global problem-solving. Whether through cross-border disaster-preparedness efforts in the Caribbean, collaborative health research between African and Asian laboratories or Latin American-led renewable-energy projects, countries of the Global South are not only recipients but also originators and co-creators of solutions.

To further embed the Bandung Principles within the multilateral system, UN members established South-South cooperation trust funds[2] and entrusted them to the UNOSSC. These funds, with pioneering contributions from the Global South, created dedicated financial mechanisms to channel resources and to ensure that South-led priorities receive institutional backing from across the UN development system. They are an enduring testament to the leadership of developing countries in shaping cooperation on their own terms.

Each year, the international community marks the United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation[3] on 12 September, not only to commemorate the 1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action but also to recognise how far Bandung's spirit has travelled. Cooperation among equals is no relic of the past; it is a living force for innovation, solidarity and collective action.

Triangular cooperation plays a distinctive bridging role, uniting the resources of countries in the North with the leadership and ownership of the South. It strengthens the capacity of developing countries while mobilizing global coalitions for lasting change. This is Bandung's principle of equitable partnership brought to life on today's global stage.

The UN retains a unique structural advantage: universality. It is the only platform where every state – regardless of its economic weight, geopolitical status or population – has equal standing. Yet universality alone does not guarantee relevance. Even as partnership patterns shift, equal standing in this forum strengthens legitimacy, coordination and collective action on problems no single alliance or partnership can resolve on its own.

The UN's track record demonstrates real capacity for self-renewal. In 1960s and 1970s, after decolonisation, it integrated new states into the system and expanded the development agenda, launching agencies focused on health, education and trade for a new era. In the 1990s, after the Cold War, it entered new territory in peace operations, preventive diplomacy and human rights, while championing sustainable development. In the early 2000s, in the wake of humanitarian crises in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, it adopted ground-breaking reform ideas, like the Responsibility to Protect, and improved coordination.

Today, the UN stands again at a crossroads, with ever more urgent calls for reform. The debates on

Security Council representation, the global financial architecture and the Pact for the Future highlight the need to integrate South-South and triangular cooperation into its core operating principles for inclusive policy-making and program delivery.

> **'The debates on Security Council representation, the global financial architecture and the Pact for the Future highlight the need to integrate South-South and triangular cooperation into its core operating principles for inclusive policy-making and program delivery.'**

The Bandung Spirit was about mobilising collective purpose to reshape global power relations. Sustaining such energy in today's complex order requires transformation on both sides. The South must deepen collective action through South-South and triangular frameworks, expand cross-regional knowledge corridors and institutionalise joint policy innovation. The North must move beyond donor-recipient paradigms, co-develop solutions, adjust financing frameworks to accommodate innovation and make long-term investments in partnerships built on trust and accountability.

One example is the South-South Galaxy[4] platform, hosted by the UNOSSC, which connects policy-makers, practitioners and funders. It facilitates peer-to-peer learning; for example, enabling climate-smart technologies developed in Southeast Asia to be applied in Pacific Island states. It also supports the sharing of best practices and provides a Solutions Lab to pilot new ideas. Platforms like this are essential for accelerating the exchange of locally relevant solutions and scaling community-driven impact.

The UNOSSC's new Triangular Cooperation Window[5] is an example of making long-term investments in partnerships built on trust. It is a facility under the United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation designed to mobilise resources, knowledge and expertise from a diverse range of stakeholders – including developing and developed countries – to accelerate progress.

Today, countries in the North and South are diversifying their partnerships, collaborating on infrastructure, digitalisation, sustainable agriculture and peace operations with multiple sets of partners. The UN's distinctive mission is to remain the trusted convener and standard-setter amid this dense web of cooperation. In accordance with the principles of sovereign equality of all its members, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for human rights and international cooperation, as established in the United Nations Charter, it must fulfil its role by continually fostering inclusive dialogue and national ownership, facilitating universally accepted standards, integrating innovative technologies, promoting South-South collaboration and enabling broad partnerships across sectors.

In 1955, Bandung reframed international cooperation as a partnership among equals – an idea that was radical and pragmatic. In 2025, South-South and triangular cooperation are the closest operational realisation of that vision: rooted in Bandung's ethical framework yet adapted to a world where the North-South binary is increasingly fluid.

Pandemic risk and recovery, climate upheaval and rapid technological shifts are all trans-boundary; so too must be our solutions. The collaboration in disaster-risk management across the Global South, green hydrogen consortia led by developing countries and women's entrepreneurship networks spanning continents all point to a more inclusive multilateralism. The High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation[6], the main UN policy-making body on this topic, is playing a central role in this, ensuring accountability and reinforcing the integration of South-South and triangular cooperation across the UN system.

> **'The UN, as convener and standard-setter, has a unique responsibility to weave together South-South, North-South and triangular partnerships into a more coherent and equitable multilateral fabric.'**

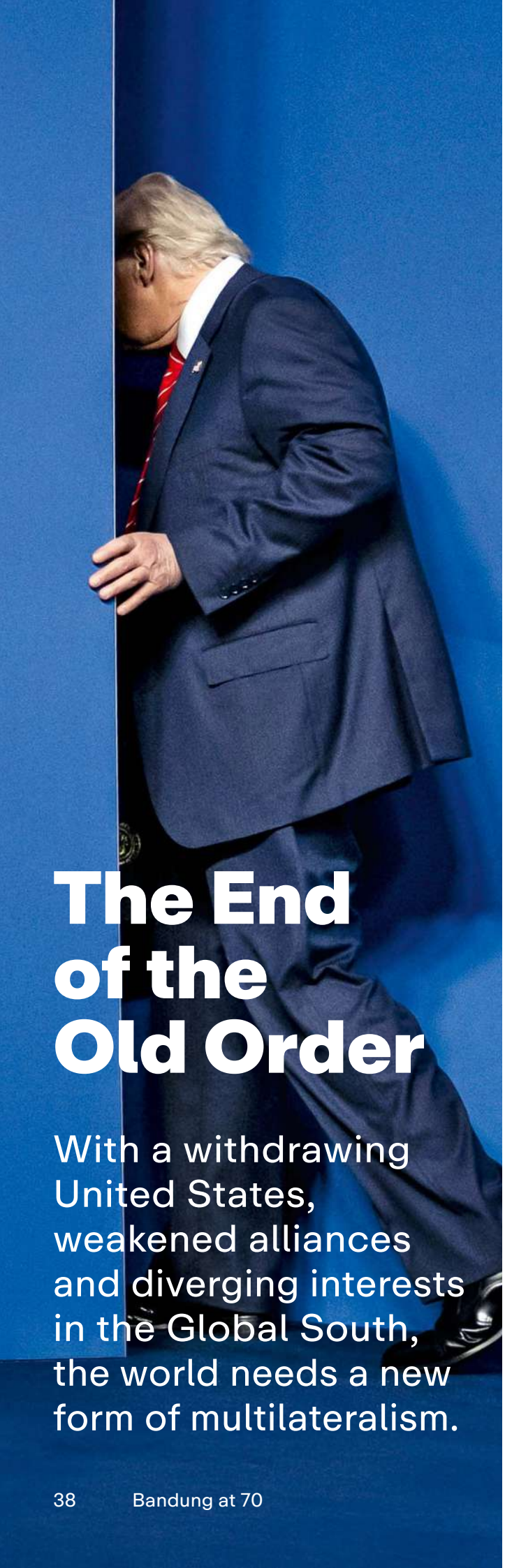
As the UN turns 80 and Bandung turns 70, renewal must come not from defending the global system as it is but from re-imagining it as truly inclusive in purpose and practice. The Bandung Principles of trust, mutual respect and co-creation remain the foundation upon which this renewal must be built.

The enduring lesson of Bandung is that partnership among equals is not an aspiration but a necessity for stability and shared prosperity. The UN, as convener and standard-setter, has a unique responsibility to weave together South-South, North-South and triangular partnerships into a more coherent and equitable multilateral fabric.

Bandung's message endures: cooperation among equals is essential. Today, South-South and triangular cooperation transform that message into practice – turning history into a pathway for our shared future. ↖



Dima Al-Khatib
is the director of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation.



The End of the Old Order

With a withdrawing United States, weakened alliances and diverging interests in the Global South, the world needs a new form of multilateralism.

In the next years, the global system will continue to undergo tectonic changes. After an era of economic volatility and with the intensifying effects of climate change and the strain on the multilateral system, the United States' swift, unprecedented retreat from the world it created in 1948 has led to massive financial, institutional and political gaps. The transition will irreversibly alter the multilateral system, reduce the dominance of the West and reconfigure relationships in the Global South.

Alliances created over three-quarters of a century are severely weakened. The United States, formerly an anchor of global stability (often with limited liability), will find itself without allies for a generation or longer. Some European countries seem willing to fill the void left by its withdrawal, but whether Europe will be able to meaningfully shape the 21st century remains to be seen. So far, the emerging heavyweights in the Global South have shown little interest in overcoming their narrowly defined notions of their national interests for the greater good. But even if they would, a weakening of the normative framework of international law and a rules-based order would be the likely result. Hence, the world will live through an era of fragmented multilateralism for the foreseeable future. The questions arise: How can global challenges still be addressed under fragmented multilateralism? And what consequences will this development have for international cooperation?

It is instructive to look back 70 years to the 1955 Bandung Conference where emerging states tried to capture what seemed a historic opportunity, only for divergence and the changes of the following decade to undermine the project. A similar fate might be in store for BRICS, also a product of geopolitical change in times of rapid economic globalisation. Bandung took place at a pivotal moment in global history. Colonial empires finally lost control and decolonisation movements took different political forms, from nationalism to revolution. Meanwhile, the incipient Cold War began to influence many, if not all, of the independence movements.

The alliance envisioned in Bandung was established in an era of enormous political and social change, and it would not last. Five years later, political differences between communist and non-aligned countries began to undermine the notion of solidarity among developing nations in the Global South. Non-aligned states organised rival conferences, and the bipolar world order forced most governments to affiliate with either the West or the Soviet Union and its satellites.

The Bandung Conference was a product of a historical interim period, established on a legitimate aversion to a global system in which Western states and alliances set many legal, political and economic parameters. However, participants could not agree on a joint vision for a global order that posited itself within the dual traditions of democratic

enlightenment and self-determination – as in the recently expanded BRICS.

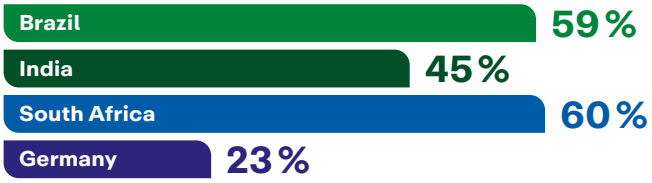
In times of turmoil, disorientation and disorder, such a unifying vision has material value. Without one, the dilemma is clear: multilateral institutions, agreements and alliances face their most serious crisis since the Second World War. Despite notable achievements as recently as 2015, including the Iran nuclear agreement and the Paris Climate Agreement, traditional multilateralism is facing pressure from all sides. The international order has fundamentally altered since the end of the Cold War due to the rise of new regional powers and the growing influence of emerging economies, including China, India, Brazil, Turkey and Indonesia. By primarily pursuing narrowly defined national interests in their international politics, they contribute to the fragmentation of the global order. Additionally, anti-Western sentiment and attempts to overthrow the global arrangements of past decades have gained support in unexpected places. In the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and France, isolationist movements have gained the backing of large segments of the middle classes.

> **‘Hence, the world will live through an era of fragmented multilateralism for the foreseeable future.’**

To fully appreciate the disintegration of the global system, it is important to recognise that the existing multilateral institutions resulted from three phases of development: the Second World War, the early Cold War, and the period following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Multilateral institutions and agreements have typically emerged in the aftermath of devastating crises, representing an attempt to address or contain problems that overwhelm national and bilateral capacities. The current ones have proven remarkably successful and resilient in the face of a constantly changing global order.

The most significant turning point was the Second World War. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the Atlantic Charter in 1941. This led to a series of multilateral institutions and agreements, including the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. In the highly criticised hegemonic setup of the UN Security Council, the wartime allies – the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, China and France – would provide security and stability to the world as permanent members with veto power. The newly established multilateral economic structures primarily reflected the United States’ dominant commercial weight after the war. The victorious allies also established several multilateral institutions aimed at development and humanitarian aid. In the years immediately following the war, the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization were founded.

The influence of the United States is evaluated negatively by experts in …



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The evolving US-Soviet ideological and geopolitical competition quickly led to new Western multilateral institutions with more modest ambitions and a greater focus on the emerging demands of strategic rivalry with Moscow, such as NATO and the Marshall Plan. While participants at the Bandung Conference were discussing an alternative path toward modernisation and global governance, the transatlantic alliance established more complex intra-European multilateral institutions, such as the European Coal and Steel Community, which developed into the European Economic Community’s common market and customs union in 1957.

Given the bipolar Cold War order, meaningful new multilateral entities could only develop following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Founded in 1993 and 1995 respectively, the European Union and the World Trade Organization (WTO) promoted economic integration on an unprecedented scale. They established a framework for commercial globalisation that increasingly separated economic integration from democratic legitimacy.

The year 2008 was another turning point that highlighted the importance of multilateral institutions. The global financial crisis put a lot of pressure on institutions such as the EU, but it also showed how important they are during times of crisis. However, the crises that occurred after 2008 overshadowed the emergence of a new form of multilateralism encompassing traditional security and economic institutions as well as new challenges like climate change and new actors like companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Rather than binding governments to the rules of institutions like the EU or WTO, this new multilateralism took a flexible, pragmatic approach to solving global problems. It seemed quite successful until 2015, when the United Nations announced the Sustainable Development Goals, the Iran nuclear deal was agreed upon and the Paris Climate Agreement was negotiated. The response to the 2014 Ebola pandemic also provided a model for reforming global health institutions.

Despite its initial success, this new multilateralism could not endure in a world where the old global compact was fading. Until then, the post-Cold War order implicitly guaranteed substantial privileges to the United States as the dominant economic power and the world's primary financial hub. Washington held de facto veto power in many multilateral institutions and was responsible for managing the global system and providing stability. However, after 2008, it became increasingly obvious that the United States would not uphold its end of the bargain. In 2017, the first Trump administration weaponised trade for the first time, disregarding long-established rules. In 2020, the Biden administration did nothing when it was time to share vaccines globally. Between 2008 and 2020, the end of the old order was cemented, and the re-election of Donald Trump only accelerated the process.

'It is important that relations between civil society actors not be limited to the national level. Democracy, human rights and multilateral initiatives require uncompromising international philanthropy.'

Given a heterogeneous world, an unclear distribution of power and many new actors, the experiences of pragmatic multilateralism over the past 20 years provide a point of reference for the future. Promising new initiatives must focus less on creating rigid institutional structures and more on flexible, cooperative ways to circumvent institutional and political obstacles and solve international problems pragmatically.

Today, it is important to consider flexible approaches to pressing issues and develop coalitions. In the future, formal agreements and treaties will be less important for establishing international institutions or creating legal obligations. The political barriers are simply too high for the foreseeable future. This is why NGOs and philanthropic foundations must play a crucial role in supporting and developing new approaches. Civil society actors played a key role in the Paris climate negotiations, effectively supporting diplomatic efforts. In times of growing right-wing populism and continuous attacks on the international system, NGOs and philanthropic foundations must take on more responsibility. They must rediscover the importance of international cooperation in support of human rights, democracy and liberal values. They must also bring important issues into the public debate. Right-wing populists have formed a nationalist international. Therefore, it is important that relations between civil society actors not be limited to the national level. Democracy, human rights and multilateral initiatives require uncompromising international philanthropy.

The new areas of engagement are more complex than previous questions of economic stability, peacebuilding or the post-war integration of former rogue states. The challenges of the 21st century are multi-dimensional and transnational. A new multilateralism will have to tackle many of them. For example, food security and the use of food systems as a weapon of war will be key topics in global security. According to UN estimates, over 730 million people worldwide are starving, including about one-fifth of Africa's population. Meanwhile, 2.8 billion people cannot afford healthy food. This year's Global Hunger Index lists 36 states where the threat is acute. Furthermore, food is being weaponised in various ways, including the manipulation of food access (Gaza), the use of food insecurity as a recruitment and retention tool (Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria), and the targeting of agricultural infrastructure and supply chains. Russia has perfected the latter in its invasion of Ukraine. The geopolitical implications of its use of hunger as a weapon are vast. In effect, Russia is taking hostages by starving people thousands of miles away from the actual battlefield, from East Africa to Asia. Because of this, new forms of deterrence are needed – besides the need to categorically outlaw the weaponisation of food, they include strengthening of global food systems, addressing climate change, and creating much more resilient supply chains.

Ideally, a new multilateralism that addresses this and other challenges, such as climate and energy security or migration and demography, would lead to a meaningful debate on an expanded concept of national and military security appropriate to the complex crises of the 21st century. This would require national and multilateral institutions to discourage siloed thinking and overlapping programming. A new multilateralism based on such a foundation would rely more heavily on support from the Global South, while incorporating the normative and universalist ambitions of the late 1940s. ↖

Parts of this article are based on a previous analysis for the Global Perspectives Initiative.



Michael Werz
is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a senior adviser for North America and multilateral affairs to the Munich Security Conference.

Building a Non-Aligned Technologies Movement

Europe and the Global South can achieve digital sovereignty, if power and resources are shared.



Connected network around Earth from space, symbolizing global communication, IoT, mobile web, and fintech blockchain in Asia.

Seventy years after the Bandung Conference, digital power asymmetries call for a renewed commitment to sovereignty and non-alignment for shaping a fairer digital future. The Bandung Spirit is relevant for addressing challenges such as data colonialism and technological dependencies. In a world marked by digital geopolitical rivalry, one of the key questions is how a Non-Aligned Technologies Movement could be built, emphasising digital sovereignty and the preconditions for equitable digital alliances between Europe and the Global South.

The 1955 conference united 29 African and Asian countries opposing Cold War bloc politics. Today, the Cold War binary has been replaced by complex multi-ordering and multi-alignment. At the same time, some speak of a new digital Cold War between China and the United States, driven by their hegemonic ambitions. The two countries dominate the data economy with hyperscale data centres, the highest investments in artificial intelligence (AI) and the enormous market capitalisation of their digital giants. They compete over strategic resources like rare earths, high-performance chips, undersea cables, cloud services and other data infrastructures. Meanwhile, global digital governance is tense, which affects innovation paths and regulation, and middle powers pursue flexible, non-exclusive partnerships, navigating the polarised digital world where technological dependencies could deepen domination.

President Donald Trump has weaponised US tariffs to interfere with the sovereignty of other states. The United States has imposed tariffs on trading partners worldwide, not only to protect its domestic market and attract investment but also to force concessions and to advance its digital and political interests. For example, Brazil faces a 50 per cent tariff on its exports as well as demands to dismiss the prosecution of former president Jair Bolsonaro and drop its social network regulations. Similarly, India is pressured to stop buying Russian oil. The United States also seeks to hinder enforcement of digital regulations in the EU and elsewhere, including through threats of retaliation, demanding the rollback of digital taxes and the weakening of laws like the EU's Digital Market Act, Digital Services Act and AI Act. US pressure has led Indonesia to drop tariffs on software downloads, and India and Canada to respectively delay or abandon a digital services tax. With its close ties to Big Tech, the Trump administration also aims to weaken rules on content moderation, digital competition and AI

Contrary to its intent, such measures may push the Global South closer to China, which would pose

a different challenge. On the one hand, the United States promote liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation of global digital trade. It reframes digital regulations as non-tariff barriers and uses trade policy to support US digital behemoths that claim to provide services without having local operations, profit from unregulated cross-border data flows and establishing data centres, and extract data without paying taxes in host countries. US tariffs also aim to counter data localisation and competition policies. On the other hand, China shields its internet behind the Great Firewall, has developed its own platforms, and expands through the Digital Silk Road infrastructures, its standards and new global forums. Its approach has had positive effects, such as increased digital connectivity and enhanced e-commerce, but has also increased debt in some developing countries, which they repay through exports of minerals like lithium, copper and nickel.

'The digital transformation has created new forms of data colonialism, where a few global tech firms and powerful states extract and monetise data with little consent or benefit-sharing.'

A key question is whether Europe and the Global South must choose alignment with one of these digital superpowers' approaches or whether they can forge a Third Way, as the EU already claims, to pursue their digital sovereignty.[1]

A Non-Aligned Technologies Movement (NATM),[2] developed by Europe and Global South countries, could counteract domination and reckless uses of power by China and the United States. Digital non-alignment means neither fully aligning with major powers such as China and the United States nor rejecting cooperation with them entirely. Facing similar technological dominance provides strong reasons for like-minded countries from Europe and the Global South to build new alliances to escape.

An NATM would adapt Bandung's spirit to the digital age, aiming to:

- Reclaim digital sovereignty by promoting local control over data, algorithms and infrastructures.
- Resist technological imperialism through open, interoperable and inclusive standards.
- Foster South-South and triangular cooperation in technology development, capacity-building and governance.
- Promote digital non-alignment, allowing countries to diversify IT partnerships and avoid dependencies on any single power or platform.

The digital transformation has created new forms of data colonialism, where a few global tech firms and powerful states extract and monetise data with little consent or benefit-sharing. This hampers countries' ability to create their own innovative ecosystems and perpetuates inequalities everywhere. Major US tech giants pay minimal taxes globally, while disparities in connectivity, high broadband costs and limited digital skills hinder the Global South. Infrastructure asymmetries give Big Tech leverage over global data flows, shaping the digital economy's rules and reinforcing economic and political subjugation.

In response to these entrenched forms of digital exploitation, an NATM would emphasise digital self-governance, advocating diverse models and cultivating techno-social spaces beyond profit-driven and authoritarian paradigms. Its goal would be to promote sustainable development as well as individual and collective autonomy in line with the Bandung principles of self-determination. Its key strategies would combine top-down regulation of large platforms with bottom-up development of alternative digital models.

The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has become the international gold standard for privacy regulation, with 167 countries adopting similar laws and 94 establishing data protection authorities. However, enforcement remains challenging. The EU's Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act aim to limit the market power of digital gatekeepers, and to create a level playing field for small and medium-sized enterprises. Countries like Brazil, India and South Korea seek similar ex ante regulation of platforms. South Africa's Competition Commission has conducted two inquiries into digital platforms, following regulatory measures in Australia, France, Canada, the EU and Indonesia that require platforms to compensate publishers for news content so as to fund quality journalism. The massive extraction of copyrighted works for training AI raises urgent questions about consent and compensation. Giants like Google and Meta temporarily halted news services in Australia, Canada and Spain to intimidate governments. Meta also threatened to exit Nigeria after receiving a 220 million US dollar fine. It is crucial that states remain undeterred by threats from Big Tech and enforce their regulations.

There is an urgent need for policy cooperation among countries willing to rein in Big Tech and resist its pressures.[3] Germany and the EU should create policy forums, supported by think tanks, to analyse regulations, share best practices and assist countries in enforcement efforts. Triangular cooperation between Europe, the Global South and others can leverage mutual strengths and foster learning.

The US government is heavily investing in AI development while pressuring other countries not to regulate it. It is crucial to strengthen global AI governance initiatives such as the annual AI for Good Summit (2017), the Global Partnership on AI (2018), the OECD AI principles (2019), the

UNESCO AI Ethics recommendations (2021), the G7 Hiroshima Process (2023), the UN high-level advisory body (2023) and Global Digital Compact (2024), the Council of Europe's AI Convention (2024) and the BRICS AI Declaration (2025). Shaping AI aligned with fundamental rights, humanistic values and the common good is a vital impetus. Countries like South Korea have launched 'sovereign AI' plans, and many are implementing national AI policies – these efforts need to be integrated into global AI governance.

Data governance should empower countries and communities to control their data, prevent exploitation and keep value within their economy.

To reduce technological dependencies, local research and development investments should be prioritised to build robust technical and scientific bases. Open-source software and digital public goods are key as they reduce reliance on proprietary technologies, lower costs, increase transparency, enable local customisation and ultimately strengthening digital sovereignty. Instead of pursuing larger generative AI models, smaller sector-specific ones based on quality data, consent, low energy and water use, and accessibility should be pursued. Care must be taken to prevent large players from capturing open-source technologies.

> **'For Germany and Europe, establishing genuine partnerships with the Global South requires humility, solidarity and a willingness to share power and resources. Investing in joint rule-setting, shared infrastructures, and inclusive multilateralism can forge new alliances to attain digital sovereignty.'**

Bridging the digital divide involves improving connectivity, local infrastructure and South-South cooperation for digital transformation. Promoting shared global digital infrastructures based on open-source models helps democratise access and control. Digital Public Infrastructures like India Stack, Pix in Brazil and others supported by the United Nations Development Programme should be complemented by privacy laws and privacy-enhancing technologies. Regional efforts such as the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy, the RedCLARA network in Latin America and EU-African partnerships can reduce dependence on external providers and build collective resilience.

Public procurement policies will foster the development of local digital technologies, providing alternatives to Big Tech.

Digital technologies are not ends in themselves; they should promote human agency and address societal problems, not just serve technological fixes. They should be designed to meet social needs, promote inclusion and uphold human rights: by supporting vernacular languages, climate-efficient tools and innovations for public transport.

Strong political will combined with active involvement from civil society, academia and supportive private-sector actors is essential. Grassroots movements, open tech communities and transnational advocacy networks can democratise digital governance and ensure accountability.[4] Digital sovereignty must also prioritise democratic empowerment and stay within planetary boundaries.[5]

The EU's 2030 Digital Compass[6] recognises the need for a 'comprehensive and coordinated approach to digital coalition-building and diplomatic outreach'. The EU has signed digital partnerships with Canada, Japan, Singapore and South Korea to promote sustainable and inclusive technology governance. These partnerships should be extended to like-minded Global South countries to increase global impact. The 2023 EU-Latin America and Caribbean Digital Alliance exemplifies bi-regional cooperation:[7] similar initiatives should be developed with the African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Europe must also move beyond paternalistic or extractive approaches, supporting genuine capacity-building, technology transfer and financial aid, while acknowledging colonial legacies and promoting dialogue and mutual development.

An NATM would mark a paradigm shift from digital dependency to self-determined, human-centric digital architectures. This echoes the Bandung principles of development and self-reliance. Leveraging South-North and South-South cooperation, and the principles of digital public goods, an NATM would foster a democratic and inclusive digital future.

An NATM could also unite countries in reclaiming their agency, resisting domination and building inclusive, interoperable and equitable digital systems. For Germany and Europe, establishing genuine partnerships with the Global South requires humility, solidarity and a willingness to share power and resources. Investing in joint rule-setting, shared infrastructures, and inclusive multilateralism can forge new alliances to attain digital sovereignty. Reimagining the Bandung spirit for the digital age offers inspiration for collective action toward a more just and equitable global digital order. ↖



Ingrid Schneider
is a professor of political science at the Department of Informatics at the University of Hamburg.



Keeping the Peace in a World Beyond Blocs

In an era of multi-alignment, peacekeeping is a litmus test for multilateralism.

UN peacekeepers in blue helmets patrol a street in Goma, North Kivu, DR Congo.

Seventy years after the Bandung Conference, multi-alignment is on the rise, with profound implications for collective security. Peacekeeping, as one of the most visible instruments of multilateralism, embodies the promise and the strain of this new era. Examining its successes and challenges offers insights into how the spirit of Bandung can be revitalised for today's fractured global order.

The scope, intensity and impact of violence globally have been on the rise since 2020. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data index, there was a 25 per cent increase in political violence in 2024.[1] A greater increase in the impact on civilians can be expected in 2025. While this is attributed to the conflicts in Gaza, Myanmar and Ukraine, there is also a pattern of persistent attacks on civilians in DR Congo, Haiti, Sudan and the Sahel. Arguably, the increased level of violence is not matched by the response from the global peace infrastructure. The inability of the United Nations, the primary guarantor of international peace and security, to deploy peacekeeping with a view to protecting civilians has been criticised. The growing geopolitical divide that has strained the Security Council is cited as one of the primary reasons for the lack of effective UN response. On the other hand, some argue that deploying peacekeepers would not be sufficient as the global conflict landscape has drastically changed, leaving little to no room for traditional UN approaches.

> **'The growing geopolitical divide that has strained the Security Council is cited as one of the primary reasons for the lack of effective UN response.'**

Since the UN was created, peacekeeping has been an effective albeit sometimes strained method of helping countries transition from conflict to peace. In the 1990s, it had significant great-power support and, in many ways, bore rich dividends. With the War on Terror, the onset of new conflicts and the emergence of a new cold war, the United States and

other Western countries gradually lost interest in peacekeeping. Whether today UN members and other stakeholders can make sure it remains an effective tool for current and future challenges is an open question.

The need for concerted efforts to lower the level of violence through military deterrence and political dialogue, to protect civilians and to support the implementation of peace agreements remains a priority for the UN.[2] Its peacekeeping operations have had notable successes in achieving these goals when they were well-resourced, consent-based and integrated with broader political and development frameworks. This was the case in Sierra Leone (1999–2005) and Liberia (2003–18) where disarmament, elections and institution-building were effectively supported. Multilateral institutions' ability to be more agile, responsive and adapted to the ever-changing landscape is crucial, as stressed in the Pact for the Future and many other UN reform frameworks. The UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin earlier this year was an amplifying platform for a call about peacekeeping operations being a crucial component of global peacemaking.

Peacekeeping is most effective when anchored in a signed peace agreement and enjoying regional and host-state support. The UN missions in Namibia (1989–90), Mozambique (1992–94) and Timor-Leste (1999–2002) showed this: each was enabled by a negotiated settlement, regional buy-in and local consent, which allowed the UN to supervise transitions, elections and state-building with relatively limited resistance. The establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority as the de facto government in Cambodia in 1992–94 to oversee elections, administration and state functions took things even further – it was a rare case of the UN exercising direct executive authority. However, the UN has not authorised a new mission over the past 12 years. Instead, missions have been closed down. The one in Mali, for example, was terminated in 2023 after the authorities requested its withdrawal. This case illustrates that even the most resourced missions cannot succeed without consent and a genuine political settlement.[3]

The mismanagement of the politics of peacekeeping has, in some cases, led to poor planning in transitions, which in turn has reversed gains made. In contrast, where successful missions prepare a conditions-based exit, backed by sustained financing, peace agreements have held. In Sierra Leone, over 70,000 combatants were disarmed and reintegrated, while in Liberia there was a combination of security-sector reform and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration with three peaceful elections, culminating in the first democratic transfer of power in 2018.

In the same vein, missions produce successes when political will creates room for the full use of the peacekeeping toolkit. The efforts to respond to structural constraints at the local level in the Lake Chad Basin, for example, are seen as a case of successful blended stabilisation.[4] On the other hand, there are strains where top-down efforts focuses on elites and formal agreements while overlooking local drivers of violence such as land disputes, community governance and struggles of traditional authority. This creates 'peace on paper' but insecurity on the ground.[5] Without sustained grassroots engagement, national-level agreements have failed to translate into real security.[6] South Sudan provides an example where the UN mission supported elite peace negotiations but local cattle-raiding conflicts and inter-communal violence continued to cause mass displacement and casualties.

> **'Peacekeeping operations are increasingly dealing with asymmetric threats, including the growing one from non-state armed groups.'**

Peacekeeping is most effective where there is peace to keep; that is, where it supports the delivery of a peace agreement. However, operations are increasingly dealing with asymmetric threats, including the growing one from non-state armed groups. The need for more robust peace enforcement has seen a rise in partnership peacekeeping, with regional bodies increasingly taking the lead. Partnership peacekeeping is an innovation aiming to leverage the political proximity of regional institutions and to use regional forces in operations.

Ad hoc arrangements – as in the deployment of Rwandan troops in Mozambique and of Kenyan police in Haiti – is an option that circumvents the lengthy UN deployment process. They are less costly, smaller than traditional UN deployment, and in some cases offer more agile responses to threats. But, where such operations have been successful, one can only speculate whether a traditional UN mission would also have been able to achieve the same results.

Countries can shape the future of peacekeeping in various ways – such as engaging in UN reform platforms like Action for Peacekeeping and the New Agenda for Peace – so as to make it more responsive to today's complex conflicts. Since 2018, over 150 UN members have endorsed Action for Peacekeeping, pledging to support more focused mandates, better training and stronger political support.

The core goals of the New Agenda for Peace are:

- Shifting from crisis response to preventing conflict through diplomacy, early warning and risk reduction.
- Making missions more flexible and modular, and adapting their size and design to each context.
- Deepening collaboration with regional organisations to share burdens and increase local legitimacy.

- Disarmament and addressing global security risks, including those related to nuclear arms, cyber threats, artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons.
- More sustained and predictable funding for the UN Peacebuilding Fund and post-mission transitions.
- Prioritising the UN Women, Peace and Security and the UN Youth, Peace and Security agendas to make peace processes more inclusive and sustainable.

Countries can take advantage of it in several ways to advocate reforms:

- They can use the agenda to push for realistic, modular mandates and to demand that the UN Security Council align resources with expectations.
- They can tie their contributions to the reform agenda, highlighting or pledging critical enablers such as aviation, medical evacuation, local-language units, and intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance.
- They can argue for stronger UN partnerships with regional actors, ensuring missions match local dynamics.
- They can point to the agenda to support gender-balanced deployments, national gender and youth action plans, and the inclusion of youth mediators.
- They can champion assessed contributions or predictable financing for missions, pushing beyond ad hoc voluntary funding.
- They can use the agenda's emphasis on community engagement and protection to demand stronger accountability mechanisms (such as for tracking civilian harm or addressing sexual exploitation and abuse).

UN peacekeeping remains one of the international community's most visible tools for managing conflicts but its effectiveness depends on credible political frameworks, adequate resources and genuine host-state consent. Successes in Cambodia, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste have demonstrated that well-designed and well-supported missions can deliver stability and enable democratic transitions, while cases like the DR Congo and Mali missions have highlighted the risks posed by overstretched mandates, obstructive governments and persistent local violence. Reform efforts such as Action for Peacekeeping and the New Agenda for Peace provide pathways to make operations more realistic, inclusive and accountable.

‘Reform efforts such as Action for Peacekeeping and the New Agenda for Peace provide pathways to make operations more realistic, inclusive and accountable.’

The fate of peacekeeping is a litmus test for the viability of multilateralism in an age of multi-alignment. If states reconcile their competing interests to support robust, inclusive and adaptive peace operations, peacekeeping can be a cornerstone of collective security. If they do not, its decline may symbolize the broader erosion of multilateral cooperation. Reimagining peacekeeping in this moment is therefore not only about improving missions; it is also about preserving the Bandung Spirit of shared responsibility in building a more just and peaceful international order. ↖



Hafsa Maalim
is advisor on intergovernmental relations at the Commonwealth in London.



Shafqat Munir
is senior research fellow and head of the Bangladesh Centre for Terrorism Research at the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies.

From Bandung to BRICS

Southern multilateralism should not be understood as a threat to the Global North, but rather as an invitation to cooperate.

Today, multipolarity is almost a cliché of global politics. But the 29 leaders who met in 1955 at the Bandung Conference already offered a truly global perspective on multipolarity. They championed a vision of development cooperation led by the Global South while engaging the Global North as a partner. The final Bandung communiqué condemned all manifestations of colonialism. It was thus widely viewed as not only an attack on the formal colonialism of the Western European powers but also the Soviet Union's occupation of Eastern Europe and the informal colonialism, or neocolonialism, of the United States. In addition, it outlined mechanisms to deepen cooperation in the economic, cultural and political spheres, and it closed with a call for the establishment of an economic development fund to be operated by the United Nations. Bandung's emphasis on economic development and national sovereignty proved to be powerful rallying points for the Global South, leading to the 1974 Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO).

> **'Every word of the 'New International Economic Order' was significant. It offered a new alternative to the liberal international order forged by the United Kingdom and the United States during the Second World War.'**

The NIEO was a hotly debated transnational governance reform initiative in the early 1970s, which inaugurated a global conversation on the politics of development led by the Global South. Its proponents aimed to transform the governance of the global economy. They hoped to redirect the benefits of global integration toward developing countries, thereby completing the geopolitical process of decolonisation and creating a democratic global order. The NIEO was an endeavour to redress the historical grievances of newly independent states, thereby completing decolonisation, through a relatively cautious approach to reforming global economic and political power arrangements. It called for global redistribution – including financial, resource and technology transfers – from rich to poor countries. It sought to extend the principle of sovereignty from the political to the economic realm, and it was an effort to create a global regulatory framework for transnational corporations. Implicit was a bid to empower the United Nations General Assembly as the legislative body for making binding international law, a radical challenge to the historic hegemony of the North Atlantic industrial core, and an alternative model for transnational economic integration that sowed the seeds for globalisation.

The NIEO was, thus, far from a single coherent entity.[1] Rather, it gathered a set of loosely compatible agendas. One can think about it as an ensemble of initiatives to reform the structure, governance and norms of the global economy that would, eventually, improve the position of the states labelled the Third World, the Global South or the developing countries. As such, every word of the phrase 'New International Economic Order' was significant. The NIEO offered a new alternative to the liberal international order forged by the United Kingdom and the United States during the Second World War. It was self-consciously international in that it focused on redressing hierarchical relations between countries. It was about extending political sovereignty to economic sovereignty. And it was about establishing a different order: a stable system with norms, values and rules. The NIEO was espoused by delegates of the developing countries that had organised themselves under the Non-Aligned Movement at various international forums in the 1960s. A South-led movement, it illustrated a connected politics drawing on collaborations and networks within the Global South and between the Global South and Global North.

The centrepiece of the NIEO was the declaration made by developing countries at the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 where specific economic, legal and political claims were advanced, most stirringly by Algeria, which

In the next five years, relations between high- and low-/middle-income countries will deteriorate, say experts in …



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chaired the Non-Aligned Movement. The declaration set out 20 principles. Some directly challenged the economic relationship between developed and developing countries. For example, the principle of 'full permanent sovereignty of every State over its natural resources and all economic activities' spoke to the concerns of commodity producers worldwide. The principle of 'regulation and supervision of the activities of transnational corporations' expressed the aspiration that these actors operate within the bounds set by state sovereignty. States where such corporations operated should be allowed to take relevant measures in the interest of their economy. The principle of 'preferential and non-reciprocal treatment for developing countries, wherever feasible, in all fields of international economic co-operation whenever possible' urged industrialised countries to open their markets to manufactures from developing countries without the expectation that the latter would do the same.

At the core of the NIEO's agenda were interrelated proposals for reforms to the structure, governance and norms of the global economy, designed to improve the position of the developing states. In addition, the NIEO made demands regarding aid and technology transfers from developed countries to developing ones, as well as to the abovementioned regulation of transnational corporations. Together, these proposals amounted to an assertion of the economic sovereignty of post-colonial states. In making these economic claims, the proponents of the NIEO were also advancing legal and political claims.[2]

Despite the collapse of the demands for an NIEO by the end of the 1970s, the idea of development first expressed at Bandung remained powerful enough to glue together the Global South and its allies in the Global North. This was reflected during the debates on the right to development at the United Nations in 1986.[3] All but nine of the 193 countries and territories represented at the General Assembly voted in support of it. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Sweden, the United Kingdom and West Germany abstained. The United States cast the lone vote against, isolating itself from the global community. The advent of unipolarity by the end of that decade appeared to vindicate its stand.

The triumphalism of a unipolar world under US hegemony proved short-lived. As the global financial crisis battered Western economies in 2007 and 2008, many fast-growing economies of the Global South weathered the storm, underlining the shifting patterns of income that now characterised the global political economy. In 2009, Brazil, Russia, India and China held their first BRIC summit to chart the future of the global economy. Within a year, South Africa joined the group. It had already been a key partner to Brazil and India in their IBSA trilateral format established in 2006, when India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh celebrated IBSA as 'a pioneering initiative for South-South cooperation'.[4] South Africa's entry into BRICS directly resonated with Brazil and India's aspiration of expanding its footprint in the Global South. The BRICS expansion in 2024 and 2025 has made it a ten-member coalition that accounts for 46 per cent of the world's population and 35 per cent of its gross domestic product in purchasing power parity terms.

> **'The ascendance of BRICS has often been perceived as disruptive of multilateralism and risking anarchy, chaos and destruction, but it is in fact a harbinger of Southern multilateralism.'**

The aspiration for BRICS to represent the Global South has been clear in the annual statements issued at its yearly summits. The first summit acknowledged that the 'poorest countries have been hit hardest by the global financial crisis' and called on developed countries to fulfil their commitment to spending 0.7 per cent of gross national income in official development assistance.[5] The summit also affirmed the need for a comprehensive reform of the United Nations so that it could effectively meet contemporary global challenges. Support for a 'more democratic and just multi-polar world order' was also underlined. Variations of these three themes have made an appearance in every single summit declaration since, culminating in the 2023 declaration committing BRICS to amplifying and integrating the 'voice of the Global South'.[6]

The ascendance of BRICS has often been perceived as disruptive of multilateralism and risking anarchy, chaos and destruction, but it is in fact a harbinger of Southern multilateralism.[7] If multilateralism refers to an institutional arrangement between three or more countries aimed at solving collective problems,[8] Southern multilateralism refers to institutional arrangements initiated, led and resourced by Global South countries. Building on the rich history of 'Global south institutionalism'[9] and South-South cooperation,[10] Southern multilateralism also intimates formalised institutional



Construction site of the BRICS New Development Bank headquarters, Shanghai, China.

arrangements between Global South countries. Against perspectives that highlight these countries as 'supporters', 'spoilers', and 'shirkers',[11] the perspective of Southern multilateralism suggests that they insist on sharing responsibility for global governance.

An important illustration of Southern multilateralism is offered by the New Development Bank (NDB), established in 2014 at the sixth BRICS summit. It is headquartered in Shanghai, and its president and other key functionaries are drawn from the other four founding countries. It has an initial subscribed capital of 50 billion US dollar, to be equally provided by the founding members. The payment of the amount initially subscribed by each founding member to the paid-in capital stock of the bank will be made in US dollars in seven instalments. All members have an equal vote, and none can increase its share of capital without the others agreeing. The NDB will allow new members to join, but the capital share of the BRICS countries cannot fall below 55 per cent. The NDB explicitly align the sectors it supports with their respective contributions to relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals, testifying to its ambition to share in global governance rather than subvert it.[12]

Welcoming delegates to the 2025 summit of the expanded BRICS in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was clear about the legacy to which the group lays claim. BRICS, he declared, was the heir to the Non-Aligned Movement, and he traced it back to the Bandung Conference that 'refuted the division of the world into zones of influence and advanced the fight for a multipolar world order'.[13] Despite Bandung's relegation to a footnote in most influential accounts of international relations, Lula's reference to it assumes enormous significance as US hegemony collapses. Indeed, the Southern multilateralism pioneered by BRICS can be seen as a continuation of a vision originating in Bandung.

To be sure, the expansion of BRICS also departs from the Bandung Conference in profound ways. Bandung was held in the shadow of colonialism as newly independent countries struggled with the economic, social and political effects of imperial rule. BRICS and its expansion are in line with the efforts to overcome the legacy of colonialism. If Bandung highlighted the dependence of the newly independent countries on their former colonisers, the expansion of BRICS emphasises the agency of the Global South in effecting economic and social development on its own terms. Bandung assumed the Global South to be a homogenous bloc, while BRICS and embodies the differentiation between a 'poor South' and a 'power South' within the Global South.

Despite these differences, however, the expansion of BRICS resonates with the Bandung spirit in two crucial ways: a continued concern with the development of the Global South[14] and the possibility for development cooperation that could demonstrate the allyship of European countries with Global South in its aspirations.[15] Lula's reference to Bandung should therefore be read as an invitation to collaborate with the Global South rather than confront, threaten or undermine it. ↖



Indrajit Roy
is a professor in the department of politics and international relations at the University of York.



From Bandung to IDA: A Journey of Solidarity and Development

How concessional finance carries forward the Bandung Spirit across generations.

Low water levels in Shanxi Province, China, caused by climate change.

The Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955 was the first major gathering of newly independent countries. Many of these were fragile, economically underdeveloped, politically vulnerable and navigating a Cold War world dominated by competing superpowers. Yet Bandung was not only about geopolitics; it was equally about development. Leaders recognised that true independence required more than flags and anthems. It demanded roads, schools, electricity, jobs and the dignity that comes with improved living standards. They understood the critical link between solidarity and development.

Seventy years later, the spirit of Bandung continues to resonate in the work of the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's global solidarity fund for development. Conceived in 1960 as a collective enterprise, IDA pools concessional resources from donor countries and channels them to countries most in need. Over time, the number of IDA-eligible countries expanded to nearly 80 while the donor base grew to around 60 countries. This evolution illustrates the Bandung principle that solidarity transcends borders, uniting rich and poor, North and South, around a shared development mission.

Since IDA's establishment, donor countries have mobilised more than 340 billion US dollars, which – thanks to its revolving-fund model and innovative leveraging of capital markets – translated into more than 600 billion US dollars in concessional loans and grants (or close to 1 trillion US dollars in today's prices). In effect, each donor dollar has multiplied several times over, enabling far greater impact.

When IDA was founded, about 60 per cent of the world's population lived in extreme poverty on less than a dollar a day. Today, that share has fallen to around 9 per cent. Poverty is now concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia. IDA has been a central actor in this transformation. It has financed rural roads that link farmers to markets, electrification projects that light homes and power small businesses, and water systems that reduce disease. It has funded vaccines, maternal health programs and the construction of schools. It has supported women-empowerment initiatives and institutional reforms that strengthen governance. In every replenishment cycle, poverty reduction has remained the core mission, reflecting not only IDA's mandate but also Bandung's original insistence that development is inseparable from dignity.

Every three years, IDA brings donors and recipients together in replenishment negotiations. These are more than financial pledging sessions; they are moments when priorities are set, solidarity is reaffirmed and mutual accountability is reinforced. Recipient countries articulate their needs and ambitions, whether building resilience against climate shocks, expanding digital infrastructure or investing in education. Donors commit resources but also emphasise accountability and results. These negotiations have evolved over time. In earlier decades, the focus was primarily on basic infrastructure and social services. From the mid-1990s, themes such as governance, private-sector development and debt sustainability gained prominence. Today, IDA also prioritises climate

change, digital transformation and jobs, reflecting the urgency of building a liveable planet alongside that of poverty reduction.

IDA is focused on the poorest countries. Once countries improved their living standards above a certain threshold, they moved from being a recipient to being a higher-income borrower of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the World Bank non-concessional arm. To date, 37 countries including Chile, South Korea and Turkey have gone through this process, commonly called 'graduation'. Nearly all countries participating in the Bandung Conference have engaged in IDA as beneficiaries, contributors or both. For instance, Japan joined at the outset, began contributing at the second replenishment, and is today IDA's second-largest donor. India was among the first IDA borrowers, graduated and became a donor in 2014–15, and has remained one since. This demonstrates how concessional finance can catalyse growth and poverty reduction as well as build solidarity across generations. This approach mirrors Bandung's original ethos: countries working collectively to advance human development while respecting each one's agency.

> **'Today, every donor dollar is leveraged by a factor of four, making IDA one of the most cost-effective instruments of global solidarity.'**

IDA has earned credibility by delivering results. Its concessional credits, often with maturities of 40–50 years, complemented by grant support since the early 2000s, have enabled countries to invest even when debt burdens were unsustainable. In 2017, IDA began issuing bonds in international capital markets, almost doubling its lending capacity. Today, every donor dollar is leveraged by a factor of four, making IDA one of the most cost-effective instruments of global solidarity. Such innovations explain why it is consistently replenished despite fiscal constraints in donor countries. Trust has been built over decades, including through accountability mechanisms like the World Bank Group scorecard that tracks results across 22 indicators and monitors tangible impacts.

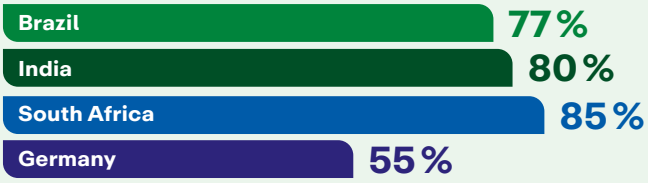
In the last decade alone, IDA support helped deliver essential health services to nearly 900 million people, connected 117 million to electricity and provided clean water to 94 million – investments that compound across generations through better human capital, productivity and resilience. As one example, in Ethiopia, the World Bank is currently supporting the National Electrification Plan through a 375 million US dollars IDA credit to help bring electricity to one million households and to pilot new approaches for off-grid electrification. IDA is now also the single-largest source of concessional climate finance. In the past decade, it has invested over 100 billion US dollars in climate action, with more than half of that dedicated to adaptation.

Yet, the global development landscape has shifted dramatically since Bandung and IDA's founding. Today's challenges are complex, interconnected and global. The Bandung Spirit faces new tests. Donor countries are under fiscal pressure, with competing demands ranging from refugee crises to the war in Ukraine. Flows of official development aid to the poorest countries, especially in Africa, are under strain.

At the same time, IDA countries confront mounting challenges:

- Fragility and conflict: An increasing number of IDA countries are classified as fragile or conflict-affected. Growing conflicts and violence disrupt development gains and displace millions. IDA now allocates a significant share of its resources to fragile states, balancing the tension between humanitarian relief and long-term development.
- Climate change: African countries contributes only about 4 per cent of global emissions, yet they are among the most vulnerable to rising temperatures, droughts, floods and food insecurity. IDA's climate financing has become a lifeline, aligning itself with the World Bank's new mission of 'a world free of poverty on a livable planet.'
- Jobs and demographics: By 2050, Africa's population will have grown by an additional billion people. In the next decade, 1.2 billion young people will enter the labour market, but only 400 million jobs are projected to be available. Without massive job creation, frustration and instability could rise. IDA is prioritising reforms, skills and private-sector growth to close this gap.
- Digital transformation: Digital technologies hold the promise of leapfrogging traditional barriers to development by expanding financial inclusion, improving public services and connecting remote communities. But they also risk deepening inequalities if access remains uneven.

My country's energy transition needs global financial support.



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IDA is increasingly investing in the digital agenda, recognising that inclusion in the 21st century requires not just roads and power lines but also broadband and data systems.

In this environment, IDA embodies multilateralism at its best: a global fund where donors, recipients, the private sector and other multilateral institutions work in concert. It collaborates with regional development banks, the UN system, bilateral donors and, increasingly, the private sector through the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. Reforms under the World Bank's new mission aim to deliver better, faster and more impactful development.

First, creating more and better jobs has long been central to IDA's mission, and we prioritise job creation as an explicit aim of everything we do. We take a three-part approach: establishing the preconditions for jobs by helping countries invest in infrastructure, health and education; linking our knowledge bank and analytics to inform our work with countries to create a predictable regulatory environment and the right conditions for private investments; and supporting businesses of all sizes with financing, equity, guarantees and political-risk insurance to encourage investors.

'In this environment, IDA embodies multilateralism at its best: a global fund where donors, recipients, the private sector and other multilateral institutions work in concert.'

Second, IDA has streamlined its operations to deliver greater speed, scale and quality. We simplified our scorecard, created a one-stop shop for guarantees and provided new crisis-response tools. Our reforms to procurement and to environmental and social frameworks reduce duplication, apply a risk-based approach and increase support for country systems, all while reinforcing our commitment to quality and accountability.

Third, IDA has expanded the IBRD's financing capacity and tools. Balance-sheet optimisation measures have unlocked around 150 billion US dollars in additional lending capacity over ten years. We launched the Private Sector Investment Lab to tackle barriers to private investment and created incentives for countries to invest in transformative reforms.

Fourth, IDA has renewed its focus on knowledge. Through the new World Bank Group Academy and increased data-collection efforts, we are leveraging our global knowledge to drive development and create scalable projects.

Fifth, IDA has enhanced its integrated 'One World Bank Group' approach, improving synergies across all its corporate functions. And we have revamped our Country Engagement Frameworks to deliver public-private solutions to clients as 'One World Bank Group'.

Looking ahead, IDA will continue to improve its impact and efficiency. At the same time, we are strengthening operational efficiency and effectiveness, with a sharper focus on client capacity: combining operational training, peer exchanges and customised support to help project teams and government officials deliver on the ground. Our reforms extend beyond our own institution. As a global convener, we have a responsibility to support an effective and dynamic multilateral system. We are deepening partnerships with other multilateral development banks, pledging to act as a system to expand financing capacity and to strengthen coordination.

A critical part of this is reducing the burden on borrowers. That is why IDA is piloting Mutual Reliance Agreements that allow them to apply a single set of requirements and to engage with a single lender for co-financed projects. And we are scaling up co-financing as a powerful force multiplier.

'If the Bandung Conference gave voice to the aspirations of the South, IDA has provided the means to make these real.'

Seventy years on, Bandung's vision of solidarity and shared development remains as relevant as ever. Then, newly independent countries sought to claim their place in the world. Today, IDA carries forward that legacy by ensuring that the poorest countries are not left behind. This reminds us that global progress depends not only on power or wealth but also on solidarity. From Bandung to IDA, the journey is one of persistence: a belief that development is not a zero-sum game but a collective enterprise. If the Bandung Conference gave voice to the aspirations of the South, IDA has provided the means to make these real. As the world confronts jobs and resilient challenges, fragility and digital disruption, the need for that spirit – solidarity in action – has never been greater. ↖



Axel van Trotsenburg is the World Bank's senior managing director, responsible for development policy and partnerships.

From Bandung Spirit to Shared Future

As global power shifts, China turns shared grievances with the Global South into partnerships while trying to convince the West that it has no interest in undoing the international order.

The roots of the Global South can be traced back to the 1955 Bandung Conference. When Carl Oglesby, a leader of the American New Left movement, raised the notion of the Global South in 1969, it evolved from an anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist critique into a rather apolitical description of the underdeveloped countries in the 1990s, replacing the 'Third World', a term with an overt political implication in relations with the two superpowers during the Cold War. Since the United States' War on Terror, Global South has come to label countries forming an increasingly potent geopolitical force, although by no means a unified bloc or with any clearly defined political-economic agenda. They are rather seen as an evolving coalition driven by demands for economic growth and more equality in global affairs and agenda-setting, with shared historical grievances and a growing capacity to act collectively vis-à-vis the West or the Global North. China has embraced the Global South concept because this fits its agenda of developing 'a community with a shared future for mankind'.

China consistently emphasizes its shared experience with the Global South countries as victims of Western imperialism and colonialism. As with most of them, the modern concept of the Chinese as a single political nation emerged during a 'hundred years of humiliation' – from the Opium War in 1840 till the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, although it is a multinational state. It was the struggle against the intruding imperialist powers, especially the Japanese invaders, that consolidated Chinese nationalism, which has become an essential source of inspiration for 'striving to build a great country and advance national rejuvenation'. Shared historical grievances and the inspiration of building a nation-state have provided China with a foundation for its Global South solidarity.

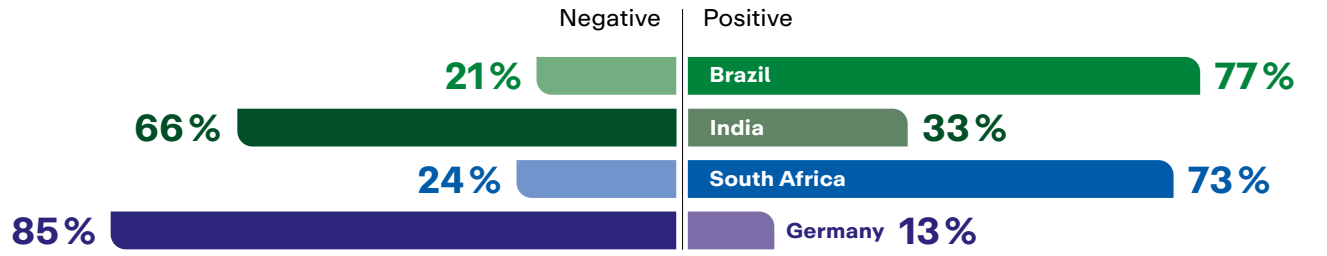
Moreover, the political heritage of the Three Worlds Theory, raised by Mao Zedong in 1974, has enabled China to take the moral high ground in the Global South. Although the label of the Third World is no longer used as it became incompatible with the post-Cold War world, its legacy of cohesion continues to glue the Global South together.

> **'The Global South concept fits China's agenda of developing *a community with a shared future for mankind*.'**

From China's perspective, the Global South's solidarity is perhaps best shown by its stances on the Ukraine war and the Palestine-Israel conflict. Although 141 UN members voted to condemn Russia's invasion into Ukraine, virtually no Global South country joined the sanctions regime against Moscow. This is not necessarily because they lean towards its narrative that the war was essentially caused by the NATO enlargement, but because they see this conflict as a proxy war to wear it down at Ukraine's cost. On the Palestine-Israel conflict, many in the Global South condemn the Israeli authorities for the genocide in Gaza and the war crimes committed against the Palestinians.[1]

Thus, although the West asserts that China is an enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine, most of the Global South – including powers like Brazil, India and South Africa – has been with China in its approach toward these two conflicts. Beijing aims to promote peace talk between Russia and Ukraine, while upholding the UN Charter by not recognizing Moscow's claim of sovereignty over Crimea and

How do you evaluate China's influence globally?



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parts of eastern Ukraine, and to support the two-state solution regarding the Palestine-Israel conflict.

China faces formidable challenges in its solidarity with and approach to the Global South due to huge economic disparities, competing geopolitical interests and strategic dilemmas posed by great-power rivalries.

Economically, the Global South is highly diversified with substantially different realities. Nowadays, China focuses on expanding its external market and domestic consumption for its industrial over-capability. But a large number of poor and fragile Global South states are struggling with food security and the vicious cycles of poverty, and they tend to be suspicious that China's lending may entrap them in dependency and debt. In its effort to promote trade and economic exchanges, China finds itself in disagreement with countries like India, which lean toward protectionist and import-substitution policies. The 'tariffs war' of the Trump administration has increased the complexity of China's economic relations with the Global South countries, some of which are tempted to cut a deal with the United States, potentially at China's cost.

In terms of geopolitics, the challenges are three-dimensional. First, the variety of political systems in the Global South has undermined its cohesion. It has not only fostered trust deficit between China and countries with different types of governance, but also tends to entrap Beijing in the Western-dominated discourse of democracy versus authoritarianism, in which it is not confident that 'the China story' is convincing in the Global South.

Second, competition between China and powers in the Global South, especially India, tends to reduce its influence there. While China and India are positioning themselves as leaders of the Global South, China's close tie with Pakistan and India's 'strategic partnership' with the United States have not only created mutual security anxiety but also complicated the political agenda of the Global South in international affairs.

Third, the divergent relationships of Global South countries with the West, especially the United States, have enabled the latter to offer incentives to some of them, especially in China's neighbourhood, not only to counter Beijing's influence, but also to enable them to drive a hard bargain in their dealing with China, although they refuse to take side in the competition between the two countries.

China sees the divergent requests in the Global South for economic growth as compatible with its effort to promote economic integration through multilateral cooperation. Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, it offers an alternative source of investment, infrastructure and trade that are not conditioned on changes in political system or governmental standards, which are usually demanded by Western actors. China positions itself as a flexible partner rather than a demanding donor, willing and capable of making win-win deals in development.

> **'China faces challenges in its solidarity with the Global South due to huge economic disparities, competing geopolitical interests and strategic dilemmas.'**

China tries to overcome geopolitical divergence by championing multilateralism and equality in global affairs. While this presents a sharp contrast to US unilateralism, it also fits the reality that the three pillars of the existing international system – the political order centred on the United Nations and its affiliated institutions, the trade and economic order shaped by the likes of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the World Trade Organization, and the financial order based on the likes of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank – are based on multilateral arrangements. Upholding the principles of multilateralism and equality, China has proposed four initiatives on global development, global security, global civilization and global governance. Although turning these into a reality is a long shot, they help Beijing to occupy the moral high ground and to position itself as the leader in the Global South.

In practice, China's approach is centred on partnerships over alliances. From the Global South's perspective, an alliance is based on shared ideology and values. Thus, it is exclusive, unequal (for example, Washington's leadership is absolute in all US-led alliances), and combative against a perceived or real common adversary. In contrast, the partnerships that China promotes are based on common interests rather than shared values. Thus, they are inclusive and open, equal with no designated leader, and cooperative in order to promote development.

The rise of the Global South has posed the fundamental dilemma to China's leaders: how to attend to the existing global order? They have reiterated that their country has benefitted tremendously from that order, but there is also an obvious impulse to take the lead in dismantling this order and to replace it with a new one. There is a strong temptation for China to work with like-minded Global South countries for a new global order. Domestically, the prevalence of nationalist sentiment and long-accumulated frustration against hypocritical Western dominance have created mounting pressure to push for a China-led global order. Externally, 'rebel' states like Iran, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela deem that the order has become an instrument for the West to undermine not only themselves but also the entire Global South, and they seek to dismantle it. Ironically, their demand is echoed by US President Donald Trump, who sees the existing global institutions as useless, and whose unilateral and ad hoc actions have already done substantial damage to the order.

'China has benefitted tremendously from the existing global order, but there is also an obvious impulse to take the lead in dismantling it and to replace it with a new one.'

Some say that China's proposals for a 'community with a shared future of mankind' and four global initiatives are aimed at developing a new global order, or that it is seeking to revise the existing order to its advantage. However, a close examination of China's behaviour as well as official speeches and documents shows that these proposals are all based on inclusive and cooperative multilateralism, and that their implementation is within the framework of the existing order. In general, China's approach in foreign affairs, especially in dealing with other major powers, is to seek compromise rather than confrontation. Its persistent call for a more democratic international system and insistence on multilateralism indicate that it prefers evolutionary reform, rather than revolutionary change, to improve the order, so that the Global South can have equal rights and a say in it, and be indispensable members like the Global North countries. Undoing and replacing the order would not serve Beijing's interest. As the world's largest manufacturer and trading power, China needs a peaceful and prosperous world. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, 'China will do well only when the world is doing well.' One can hardly imagine that the world would do well should the order that laid the foundation for world peace and prosperity after the Second World War be undone. It is in this context that China now stands firm at the forefront of opposing unilateralism in global affairs.

'Undoing and replacing the order would not serve Beijing's interest. As the world's largest manufacturer and trading power, China needs a peaceful and prosperous world.'

History shows that, as industrialization proceeded, major-power relations became conflict-driven, leading to two world wars and the Cold War. It was the brutality of these wars that gave rise to the resolve for peace, resulting in the coming together of countries to build up the existing international system. Nowadays, it is encouraging that the dominant element in relations among the major Global South powers – Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa – is not conflict but seeking compromise and cooperation, despite conflicting interests. In this regard, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization provide them with institutionalized platforms to find common ground and to build up consensus on developments that do not violate the rules and regulations established by the existing global institutions. China will remain a status quo power in the existing international system as long as these two platforms, in which it plays a leading role, keep functioning within the existing international system rather than against it. ↖



Jing Huang
is university professor at the Shanghai International Studies University and Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow of the Robert Bosch Academy.

Endnotes

Bandung at 70
(pp. 8–11)

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1 Editor's note: The question of whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza is disputed among international law experts. The International Court of Justice has not yet ruled on whether the Israeli government is committing genocide in Gaza and has granted Israeli authorities an extension until January 2026 to present their defence. Views expressed belong to the author.

Körber-Stiftung
Körber-Stiftung
Kehrwieder 12
20457 Hamburg
Germany

Phone +49 40 80 81 92 - 0
E-mail ip@koerber-stiftung.de
koerber-stiftung.de/en
Körber-Stiftung IP
@koerberhistory.bsky.social
@koerber-ip.bsky.social

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p. 14: The Asian-African Conference Monument in Bandung, Indonesia.
p.29/30: Coal Mining in Borneo, Indonesia.
p.38: Donald Trump leaves the stage after a press conference at the NATO summit in The Hague.

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