

'The world after Bandung', from Süddeutsche Zeitung (26 April 1955)

Caption: On 26 April 1955, commenting on the proceedings of the Bandung Conference, the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung considers the role and the position of Asian countries on the international scene.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft, Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner; Schönningh, Dr. Franz-Joseph; Goldschagg, Edmund; Schwingenstein, August ; R Herausgeber Friedmann, Werner. 26.04.1955, Nr. 98; 11. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Die Welt nach Bandung", auteur:Fackler, Maxim , p. 1; 2.

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The world after Bandung

by Maxim Fackler

Delegates from two dozen Asian States, meeting in a conference hall in Bandung, may represent Asia, but when individual delegates take the floor, each of them speaks first and foremost for his own country, and the Asian dimension takes second place. Asia is the sum of diverse constitutional individuals, of individual national entities. When these entities come together, the whole carries less weight than its size alone (its aggregate population of almost one and a half thousand million) might conceivably lend it. The lesson of the Conference is that we now know more or less how these individual Asian countries respond to international issues, but it has also indicated the extent to which they are prepared to subordinate their own interests to a pan-Asian strategy, in other words the extent to which their interests overlap.

The rest of the world saw the starting point of the Conference as follows: Asia's objective is to constitute with Africa an autonomous power alongside Europe and America as well as a bulwark of peace and conciliation between the major power blocs. The invitation to Bandung spoke of Asian peoples getting to know each other. This was an admission that the nations of Asia were strangers to each other in some cases and that their first priority was to acquire a sense of Asian identity. The battle cry 'Asia for the Asians' has been on people's lips ever since the Boxer Rebellion, but now it is a matter of winning over the Asians for Asia. Asia was therefore to be defined as a political concept. The resolutions do indeed contain many expressions of a common Asian will: the statement condemning the A-bomb and atomic tests (of which Asians had been the victims), the call for peace, economic cooperation and cultural exchange and, of course, the common front against colonialism.

Colonialism, it must be said, was not precisely defined at Bandung; it is merely described as domination, exploitation and oppression without any reference to the specific forms that such domination, exploitation and oppression might take. This was a means of glossing over the fact that the division between Communism and anti-Communism, in other words the Cold War, cuts through the heart of Asia, too. The resolutions give no hint of the bitter disputes that flared up during the seven days of the Bandung Conference. The anti-Communists withdrew their proposal that Communism be explicitly referred to as the 'new colonialism', and Chou En-lai, for his part, did not insist on the enshrinement of a 15-year time limit for the withdrawal of all colonial powers. The Conference reaffirmed the old truism that Asia is different. There is nothing to suggest that Pakistan or Ceylon, the Philippines or Thailand have become any less vigilant against the Communist threat, but Chou En-lai, together with Nehru, managed to ensure that ideological differences were kept out of the official Final Communiqué.

Nehru, with his commitment to neutralism, is trying to thwart any Communist effort to overrun the non-Communist States. Nehru does not seek to aid and abet the Communists either; as far as his own country is concerned, he is a sworn enemy of the Communism that comes from without, namely from the Soviet Union. Where the demand for Communism comes from within — chiefly in China — he acknowledges its validity. For that reason, he does not question in any way the legitimacy of the regime of Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai in China, but he does oppose any attempt to export their ideology to the rest of Asia. He nevertheless believes that the Communists and their neighbours can co-exist peacefully under the umbrella of 'Asia'. Chou's conduct at the Conference confirmed Nehru in this view, because Chou refused to create a common front against the United States or against the West as a whole or indeed against the white peoples in general. He subscribed to the resolutions that referred to the United Nations Charter and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, even though Peking has hitherto been excluded from membership of the United Nations. He even praised the United Nations on some points. And, lastly, he did offer to discuss the Formosa situation with the United States.

Formosa was not on the Bandung agenda, but Chou En-lai's offer is a consequence or effect of the Conference and therefore constituted an integral part thereof. Whatever the Chinese Premier's reason for adopting this conciliatory stance, the West must respond immediately. (The decisions of the Conference proper will have an impact only in the long term.) Pakistan, a member of the Commonwealth, a country that has concluded military agreements with the United States and one of the most fervently anti-Communist

countries at Bandung, undertook to inform the United States of Peking's willingness to negotiate. In this respect, Pakistan is more than just a messenger; Pakistan is taking Chou's declaration to Washington in order to convey that the whole of Asia is behind China in its wish to hold talks with America and that Asia expects the two countries to conduct these talks. The Prime Minister of Ceylon expressed the view that the risk of a third world war being provoked if Communist China attempted to take Formosa by force of arms had compelled Chou En-lai to make his offer of negotiations to Washington. If this is true, it means that the United States has achieved one of its political aims; for that very reason, it should not hesitate to engage in dialogue with the People's Republic of China. Nor should it impose any conditions for these talks, least of all an insistence on the participation of Chiang Kai-shek.

Chou does not wish to talk about Formosa itself but, in the first instance, about the need to ensure that war does not break out over Formosa, or indeed any of the coastal islands. Even if the People's Republic of China has entirely selfish reasons for wishing to negotiate with the United States of America, any effort to avoid war is an effort worth making. American diplomacy is at the crossroads. The British will do all in their power to help their American friends. If the one and only result of the Bandung Conference had been the recognition that hostilities must not break out over the Formosa problem, even that one result would have made the Conference a success, not only for Asia, where the conflict would be waged, but for the whole world. China has presented herself as a peace-loving nation, and we shall see whether she is.

At all events, the ideological independence of Asia was subordinated at Bandung to the desire for cooperation with the other continents and especially with the United Nations. Isolation is the last thing Asia wants. Foreign capital is wanted; the Charter of the United Nations is to be a model for Asia; one of the most important recommendations for international politics in the Final Communiqué states that the Bandung participants should make greater use of existing international organisations than hitherto. Direct interference by the 'white' nations, however, will meet with stiffer resistance, and this time it will be collective resistance. As we have already seen, the test case for intercontinental cooperation, and for the United States in particular, is looming up: Formosa. The next item on the agenda after that will be Peking's accession to the United Nations. But a far wider vista than this has opened up. The recipe that the Conference has given to the West — first and foremost, and once again, to the United States — is this: pursue a flexible policy on Asia, a policy that varies from country to country and from case to case, a policy that is not driven by the desire to score points. Is this not an enticing opportunity to serve peace?