

The Bandung Conference: Triumph of Diplomacy

Sugwon Kang | Hartwick College

When the Bandung Conference of Asian and African Nations met in April of 1955, the Korean War had been brought to an inconclusive ending two years earlier. The Korean peninsula remained divided, and there was no peace treaty between the warring parties, which included the People's Republic of China. The following year, 1954, the French were routed at Dienbienphu just as a great-power conference got under way in Geneva to decide the future of Vietnam. The pace of de-colonization in Asia and Africa was a subject of overriding interest to the delegates at Bandung, many of whom had experienced the sting of colonialism in a very personal way. But the United States saw the conference mainly as a threat to American interests largely because of the inclusion of Communist China as a participant. When the weeklong conference ended one diplomat was widely acclaimed as its preeminent statesman, credited with the remarkable feat of turning this unrehearsed, one-of-a-kind diplomatic venture into an unqualified success: Premier Zhou Enlai of the People's Republic of China. That was all the more remarkable because Zhou had, in all probability, been the target of a bungled American assassination plot, and he was intensely conscious of it. Zhou's quiet accomplishments at the Bandung Conference were, to be sure, a credit to his embattled regime back in Beijing, whose human rights violations continued to inspire scorn abroad. But, just as importantly, Zhou's political skills were a powerful vindication of mature diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy.

I

On April 18th, 1955, delegates from twenty-nine Asian and African nations gathered at Bandung, Indonesia, for a weeklong conference to compare notes on a wide range of issues that affected their peoples. With a combined population of 1.4 billion, representing five-eighths of the human race, these Asian and African nations had earned the right to be heard. And the nations needed to speak with one voice if they were to be understood as a group.

When the delegates wrapped up their work on the seventh day, the 25th, unanimously affixing their signatures to a long communiqué pledging cooperation in the cause of freedom and peace, it was evident that the conference had gone well. Even the skeptical American press seemed to be impressed by the progress the conference had made, after having initially portrayed it as a neutralist sellout to the communist bloc. What would these former colonies do next, now that they had tasted the thrill of diplomacy as independent sovereign states?

II

The conference had been called the year before by five neighboring countries of south Asia — India, Ceylon, Indonesia, Burma and Pakistan — meeting in the Ceylonese capital of Colombo. Of these, four were non-aligned nations in the Cold War and one, Pakistan, was a military ally of the United States. None was a communist state. And yet, the United States looked upon the planned conference with deep misgivings. It wasn't so much the audacity of these new players on the world scene staging a big show without American blessing but, rather, the company they were inclined to keep that irritated the American leaders.

Contrary to popular misperception, the adjective “non-aligned” was never used by the sponsoring nations in any of its official communications. It didn't become part of a conference title until Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito hosted a conference at Belgrade in September 1961, which was followed by its sequel at Cairo in October 1964. The event at Bandung was simply a gathering of “Asian and African nations.”

While not all of the Asian and African states were invited, the list of participants had several of America's staunch allies such as the Philippines and Pakistan, both members of the South East Asia Treaty Organization, the anti-communist military alliance formed at the instigation of the United States in September the previous year. These nations certainly could not have been included in any gathering that called itself "nonaligned". But the Colombo Five did invite the People's Republic of China, which the United States refused to recognize. And therein lay the source of American irritation.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, were always extremely polite to, and respectful of, Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister of India, who was widely perceived as the driving force behind the Bandung undertaking. But the two American statesmen never thought kindly of Nehru's incessant demands for bringing the People's Republic of China into the United Nations as a replacement for the Nationalist government now in exile on Taiwan. Because of all the economic aid India was then getting from the United States, this independent line was offensive to some in the United States, in and out of foreign policy officialdom. Columnist David Lawrence, for one, once went so far as to urge that the United States stop wasting its foreign aid money on "immoral" regimes like Nehru's India. And when the American leaders found out that the People's Republic of China had been invited by the Colombo Powers to participate at this conference they quickly recognized Nehru's fingerprints. Or, at least, they thought they had.

Eisenhower and Dulles were apprehensive that Premier Zhou would try to rally the developing nations' support for his "peaceful coexistence" idea, having had his considerable diplomatic skills tested at the Geneva conference on Indochina the previous year. And the Chinese diplomat would get plenty of support from the likes of Nehru, U Nu of Burma and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the dashing young Egyptian army officer, now prime minister, who had three years earlier launched a bloodless coup in his homeland, sending King Farouk into exile. In the unfolding contest of ideas the United States would find itself at the receiving-end, forced to decide whether or not to endorse someone else's product, this one a new vision for peace widely advertised as made in China.

There wasn't really much the United States could do under these circumstances. No one in Asia, much less Africa, was trying to pick a fight with the United States, not even Communist

China, and the United States could ill-afford to behave like an irritable bully when everyone else was smiling and holding up peace signs. On the other hand, sitting tight, waiting, doing nothing, like a good Taoist sage, was never an idea that appealed to many American leaders, so accustomed to taking charge. Even in times of doubt and uncertainty, doing “something” was the preferred way, lest they be judged indecisive.

Just a week before the opening day at Bandung Secretary of State Dulles warned his nation that peace could be a dangerous commodity. Speaking before a large crowd of Jesuits at Georgetown University on April 11th, Dulles suggested that the American people had to choose between peace and liberty, asserting that peace “can be a cover whereby evil men can perpetrate diabolical wrongs.” He then warned solemnly that “craven purchase of peace at the expense of principle can result in destroying much of the human spirit on this planet” and “could lead to a degradation of the human race” itself.¹⁾

That dramatic warning about the perils of peace was followed five days later by an announcement from the White House that the President would soon be submitting a special economic aid package to Congress to the tune of \$3.5 billion. On the 20th, as the conference got under way at Bandung, Eisenhower submitted his budget for the FY 55-56 with a message stating that the money would be used mostly for Asia, where “threats” were most acutely felt. Dubbed the “Arc of Free Asia,” the aid package had its largest single sum earmarked for the Republic of Korea to help that war-torn nation with its recovery efforts, following its bloody war that had ended two years earlier.

III

Without Chinese entry into the conflict on the side of North Korea, for which Beijing paid dearly with over 1.5 million lives, the war would have been over within a year of its commencement with a decisive victory for the United States and its South Korean allies. And along with that victory, the Korean people would have been reunified as a nation under the

1) “Dulles Cautions on ‘Craven Peace’”(The New York Times 55/04/12), with the text of the speech.

banner of the United Nations. It was China's entry that greatly complicated matters, forcing the United States to seek a truce rather than widen the conflict, as demanded by the UN commander, General Douglas MacArthur. In April of 1951, in the face of mounting evidence of insubordination by MacArthur, President Truman had him relieved of his duties, both as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Japan and as the UN commander in Korea. He was replaced by General Matthew Ridgway.

When Eisenhower entered the White House in January of 1953 it was difficult to tell whether the war was still on in Korea, with the front-line constantly shifting back and forth along the 38th Parallel. Finally, in late spring that year Eisenhower decided to break the impasse by resorting to blackmail against Beijing and Pyongyang, demanding a quick negotiated settlement from them, if they wanted to avoid a nuclear attack from an adversary who was fast running out of patience. He had run for the presidency the previous year with a pledge to end the war. The war was officially over in July that year without a victor, with the peninsula divided roughly where it had been since 1945.

The division of Korea at the 38th parallel was an American decision to which the Soviets gave their assent. The decision was made shortly after the second atomic bomb had been dropped, on Nagasaki, on the 9th of August, 1945. Just a day earlier, on the 8th, the Soviet Union had declared war on Japan, thereby fulfilling Marshal Stalin's pledge to President Roosevelt at Yalta that his country would join the Allies in Asia within three months of the end of the fighting in Europe. Deplorable as the dropping of the atom bombs was, as it is to me personally, without it the war would have dragged on. The only question was for how much longer, that is, before Japan would have surrendered. And once the Soviet Union had entered the war, which Stalin did in full compliance of his pledge, any prolongation of the conflict in the Pacific would have meant more lands falling to the Soviet Union. Within weeks, perhaps no more than a few, all of Korea would have been taken by the Red Army.

The Russians certainly had the necessary morale to get the job done swiftly. They had been waiting for a chance to avenge their humiliating defeat in the Battle of Tsushima in 1905, when they lost their entire Baltic Fleet in one catastrophic engagement with Admiral Togo's fleet, after they had dragged their war ships all the way from the North Atlantic. They paid for their blunder by giving up the southern half of Sakhalin Island, thanks to the Treaty of

Portsmouth brokered by President Theodore Roosevelt. It was their opportunity to settle old scores. The war of 1905 had erupted after a very familiar quarrel in that part of the world: three regional powers, Imperial Russia, Imperial China and Imperial Japan, all laying claims on a defenseless little peninsular kingdom, Korea, styling itself an “empire” — not wanting to stand out as an exception in a predatory neighborhood.

When the Americans were closing in on Japan following a series of bloody naval engagements in the Pacific, the Russians were looking to the fortieth anniversary of their own bloody naval encounter with Japan. In early August, 1945, the commanders of the allied forces in the Pacific had their sights set on an amphibious assault on the island of Kyushu, starting on November 1, as their first step in their planned conquest of Japan. They had no plans for fighting the Japanese on the Asian mainland. Therefore, the United States was in no position to dictate terms to the Soviets with regard to the proper disposition of Japan’s vast land forces scattered across southern Manchuria and Korea.

The Korean people’s traditional bitterness over the division of their country is all too understandable, particularly so because of the shockingly casual and playful manner in which the war planners at the Pentagon went about making their fateful decision on August 10th. On the other hand, thoughtful Koreans would weigh that just sentiment against the backdrop of the cold strategic realities of the day, which left the United States with few good options. The Allies’ pledge to liberate Korea at the defeat of Japan would be honored. But once the Soviets had taken Korea in one big sweep, they would have declared that the joint mission had now been carried out.

Thus, the decision to divide the peninsula at the 38th parallel cannot be understood except in the context of an anticipated imminent Japanese surrender. It was that shared anticipation that led the Soviet leaders to conclude that half a loaf in Korea was a fair deal for them, inasmuch as they hadn’t done any fighting in the Far East to deserve spoils of war. And, apparently, our war planners were willing to concede half of Korea to the Soviets as a goodwill gesture, because their principal concern was not to yield any part of Japan.

What ground forces the United States had at its disposal had to be deployed for the great assault on Kyushu. In the meantime the Red Army was just over the other side of the Manchurian and Korean borders poised for action, well rested from the war in Europe and well

supplied with food and materiel off the Lend-Lease shipments from Alaskan ports that had continued after the surrender of Germany, perhaps in violation of international law governing neutrality.²⁾

After having suffered catastrophic losses in the Pacific from Midway onward, while the Soviet Union continued to observe its neutrality in the war with Japan, the United States would certainly have been justified in declaring all of Korea its responsibility. And it is not clear that Stalin would necessarily have thrown tantrums over such a decision, whether by challenging it outright with troops or by making difficult demands elsewhere. Once Roosevelt had asked Stalin to jump in and help him win the war so as to limit American losses during the bleak days of the struggle in the Pacific, he was tying the hands of his successor, Harry Truman, in dealing with an ally who would someday become a belligerent in the same conflict.

IV

The prevailing mood at Bandung was that despite the unsatisfactory conclusion of the Korean War in 1953, the time had come for the nations of the world to move on and to deal with the pressing problems of the day, such as poverty, the arms race and colonialism. Most of the leaders seemed to have arrived with a sincere expectation of some gesture of good will from the United States. What they got, however, was not a blessing from a friend but a pledge of economic assistance to promote "Free Asia." That prompted some at the conference to complain that the United States was trying to pit nations against nations and that it was more interested in wrecking the conference than in helping needy nations.

The American leaders' hostility seemed to baffle as much as to annoy. There were those among the delegates who had come to think of the United States as a role-model to the former colonies because of the historical circumstances of its own founding. Indeed, without exception, the leaders of the participating nations were one-time anti-colonial fighters; many,

2) For a good discussion of the 1941 Lend-Lease Act and the politics of its implementation during the war, see McCullough 1992.

such as Pandit Nehru, had spent the prime years of their lives in colonial prisons. These were the “freedom fighters” of their generation, in the 1930s and ‘40s.

Of these one did his time as a young man in a Dutch jail in Bandung for his anti-colonial activities in the late 1920s and early 30s. Once Sukarno had risen in stature as a leader of Indonesia’s independence movement, Imperial Japan was courting his friendship as it gobbled up the islands in the South Pacific during the early months of the Pacific War. The bond between the island patriots and the Japanese Imperial Army remained strong right through the bitter military struggle between Japan and the Allies. Having remained a steadfast friend to the Indonesians throughout the conflict, the Japanese granted them their independence on June 1, 1945, even as they were counting their last days as an empire. Indonesia would have its independence declared once more just two days after Japan’s surrender in August, with Sukarno at the helm as president, thereby adding legitimacy to his struggles.

Now as the leader of the host-nation, Dr. Sukarno went out of his way in his welcoming remarks to call attention to the unique place the United States occupied in world history as the beacon of hope for the subject nations. He told the assembled world leaders that the American people had the distinction of having won “the first successful anti-colonial war in history.” Noting that April the 18th was the very date that marked the start of the American Revolution in 1775, Sukarno invited the delegates to join with him in a pledge of an unwavering struggle until all the colonies were liberated in Asia and Africa. Recalling Lexington and Concord, the multilingual Indonesian president paraphrased a line from the poem “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” by declaring, “Yes, it shall echo forevermore!”³⁾

This opening address was a moving tribute to America as well as an auspicious beginning for a great gathering. It was, in a sense, an American moment on the world stage, made all the more remarkable because it had come right at the height of the Cold War in which the United States was an active combatant. Only several days earlier America’s secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, had fired a shot across the bow, warning his nation, and presumably the whole world, that the United States was rather particular when it came to picking friends, because,

3) The conference was extensively covered by the American press, which included *The New York Times*. All factual details in this essay, including direct quotes and attributions, are taken from news articles and editorials appearing in the *Times* during the month of April 1955.

essentially, in his view, the world was made up of good forces and bad, with little in between. There being no back-pedaling from Washington as the conference progressed, it was clear that the delegates were not going to get any show of support from their powerful and irritated neighbor. What they had heard thus far was “We’re watching you,” and not “We hear you!”

If there was one person at the conference who should not have been surprised by this turn of events, that was Premier Zhou, for he had been treated to some of this hostility and snobbery when he attended the conference on Indochina held in Geneva the year before. The Geneva conference was, arguably, one of the least productive multilateral diplomatic efforts ever known in the 20th century.

The leaders of the great powers met to settle the fate of the peoples of Indochina as the French were being driven out of their Vietnamese colony in the wake of their defeat at Dienbienphu. Bewildered by what was happening in that part of the world, unable to comprehend what the future might hold in store for colonialism in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, these western powers agreed on partitioning the nation of Vietnam as their contribution to world order.

But the leaders were far from united in their outlook. A pall of distrust and suspicion hung over the participants during much of the seventy-four-day long conference, coupled with a palpable resentment at the United States for its seeming determination to do absolutely nothing that was useful and constructive. The British foreign secretary Anthony Eden seemed to speak for many when he said that he’d “never known a conference of this kind.” “The parties would not make direct contact,” he noted, adding how the participants “were in constant danger of one or another backing out the door” (Karnow 1983, 199).

As he would state in plain language afterwards, addressing a group of invited guests, President Eisenhower was dead-set against helping the Vietnamese people unify themselves as a nation except on American terms. He said that he had been warned by his experts that in a free nationwide election 80% of the vote would go to the communist leader Ho Chi Min. He wouldn’t have any of that. The United States was refusing to participate in an international effort to help a former French colony become an independent, unified nation, except as a potential American ally in the cause of anti-communism. Defeating communism was Eisenhower’s priority; national liberation or self-determination was something he was only

willing to consider.

Not surprisingly, the conference at Geneva got off to a bad start. At the opening reception where plenipotentiaries mingled with plenipotentiaries, China's Zhou Enlai made his maiden debut on the world stage, having previously dealt with his foreign counterparts only in bilateral settings, either as a host or as a guest. All eyes were on the man from Peking as he made his entrance into the reception hall. When he saw Secretary of State John Foster Dulles he went over to greet him with an extended hand. Would this be a turning-point in the Cold War? Was it a thaw in the making? As the diplomats and reporters looked on, holding their breath, Mr. Dulles snubbed his Chinese nemesis by refusing to shake his hand.

Evidently mindful of the symbolism of that unusual encounter, but clearly unrepentant, the grumpy old man from Foggy Bottom was later heard to tell an associate not to worry, for the two might yet meet again someday, perhaps in a car crash! (Karnow 1983, 199). Within a year that menacing prophecy seemed to come true as heads of state began filing in at Bandung from around the world. It would appear that sometime after Geneva Zhou became a marked man for the specialists in the "operations" department at the CIA, which was then under Allen Dulles, John Foster's younger brother. With the announcement of the conference and the Chinese acceptance of the invitation from the Colombo Five, the CIA had found a "target of opportunity." It was time to act, time to do something.

V

On Monday the 11th an Air India "Constellation" charter plane carrying a crew of seven with eleven passengers took off from the Hong Kong airport at 12:15 pm en route to Jakarta, Indonesia. Shortly thereafter the plane was blown out of the sky as it flew over the South China Sea north of Sarawak, killing all eleven passengers and four of the seven crewmembers. The three who survived the crash were able to relate their harrowing experience, telling how the plane had lost control owing to an explosion in one of the wings and how the flight crew had not observed anything out of the ordinary up to the moment of the explosion.

Immediately, the Foreign Ministry in Beijing blasted the United States for allegedly having

used some of its many “agents” in Hong Kong, perhaps Chinese agents sympathetic to the Nationalist government on Taiwan, to carry out this dastardly act. The U. S. government promptly dismissed the allegation as “preposterous”. *The New York Times* jumped in with an editorial with its own independent opinion; it called the charge “vicious”.

Just before the incident the Foreign Ministry in Beijing had, acting upon a tip, sent a telegram to the colonial government of Hong Kong asking them to be on the lookout for any suspicious movements at and around the airport, saying that there was a conspiracy afoot to tamper with aircraft carrying Chinese officials. Steps were indeed taken at the airport by the Hong Kong police to protect this very aircraft, according to published reports released immediately after the tragedy. This clearly seemed to indicate that some type of foul play had been anticipated during the days immediately leading up to the incident. Not surprisingly, the Chinese government bitterly complained that the colonial government had not done enough to protect the chartered aircraft despite the timely request.

It has been argued by a string of writers on the subject of CIA covert operations, many of them former CIA officers, that Zhou had planned to be on that fateful flight and that his life was spared because he decided, only at the last minute, to wait for a later flight so that he might confer with President Nasser of Egypt on his way to Bandung. Zhou did in fact change his plans, and he did, indeed, make a side-trip to Rangoon, Burma, to rendezvous with Nasser. But he would not have been on the ill-fated aircraft flying out of Hong Kong even if he hadn't made the changes in his itinerary; the plane was carrying Zhou's advance party, and not his official entourage.⁴⁾

It is now widely assumed that the fireball over the South China Sea on April 11th was a CIA operation gone awry. The 1976 “final report” by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, updating its 1975 “interim report” on “Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders,” has an obscure reference to some unspecified operation aimed at an “East Asian leader.” Although the passage reads more like a denial than an admission, the reference was nevertheless deemed significant when the report was released, in the context of what was

4) See Garwood 1985. Though on the whole most useful, this work falls under this category where it treats the circumstances of the ill-fated flight out of Hong Kong.

already known from open sources concerning the flight out of Hong Kong. The timing of the inclusion of that reference in the 1976 report may have something to do with the delicacy of the subject matter. Premier Zhou was alive when the “interim report” came out in 1975; he died in January the following year after having suffered with a terminal cancer since 1972.⁵⁾

If the tragedy over the South China Sea was a bungled CIA job, it was probably a simple case of a poorly-planned operation, one that mistook one Air India charter aircraft for another. It was Air India’s four-engine “Skymaster” which carried Zhou and his entourage of 20 to Rangoon on April 14th, coming in from Kunming. The plane that got blown up on the 11th, Air India “Constellation,” was a smaller aircraft. Most of the “Constellation” passengers were Chinese officials and were all members of Zhou’s advance party, whose job it was to prepare Bandung for their man before he arrived with his official entourage; the rest were foreign reporters. When Zhou arrived at Rangoon aboard “Skymaster” his official entourage included the PRC’s vice premier, deputy foreign minister, minister of foreign trade and several heads of government agencies.

Zhou’s decision to go to Rangoon first was of course known to President U Nu of Burma, who would go out to greet him. But there was an information blackout in the wake of the air disaster over the South China Sea; even Burma’s president no longer knew exactly when his guest was arriving. U Nu was at the Rangoon airport with his own high entourage to greet Zhou, but when the aircraft touched down, Zhou was not on board; he had not boarded the flight at Kunming. Was he still planning to come? Then came the message that there was another flight coming in from Kunming; “Skymaster” had just been cleared for approach. And there he was! We can very well imagine what the two men’s ride back to the presidential palace must’ve been like, starting with the host’s “Now tell me all about it!” U Nu was later overheard to tell his Chinese guest that he should try to relax.

But relaxing cannot be an easy thing for someone who has reason to believe that he’s just survived an assassination plot. Zhou’s sensation might have been one of utter exhilaration, if only he could have put the matter behind him as a bungled job and moved on. But he had no way of knowing that the hunt was now abandoned. The night before the entire Chinese

5) I owe this thoughtful speculation to Garwood 1985, 62-64.

entourage was to depart for Jakarta, Indonesia, en route to Bandung, Zhou came up with an idea: he would depart ahead of schedule.

As midnight approached, after the members of his diplomatic entourage had all retired into their respective hotel rooms, with plans for breakfast with their leader before boarding their flight out of Rangoon, Zhou called his personal aides to get ready in thirty minutes for a quiet ride to the airport, no questions asked. When the government officials assembled for breakfast the next morning, their leader was nowhere to be found; he had left Burma while they were sleeping and were now in Jakarta to do some sightseeing!

Once inside Indonesia, far away from continental Asia, Premier Zhou seemed at last relaxed. He was found freely mingling with cheering crowds in the streets of Jakarta with minimal security escort; the crowds showered him with affection as if he were a movie star or a returning war hero. He thought, perhaps, that he was finally out of danger. He could now look forward to the big show ahead in Bandung, 75 miles southeast of Jakarta.

But there's no good covert operation that does not have a backup plan to accompany it. The CIA's plot on the life of Premier Zhou did start out with a backup plan, but it was abandoned. The plan was to serve Zhou a bowl of rice at the farewell banquet in Bandung with a dash of poison custom-designed for delayed action; Zhou would feel no effect for forty-eight hours. By the time the poison took effect, the intended victim would have been back in Beijing for more than a day, too late to accuse anyone of foul play for his mortal affliction. As I understand it, this bizarre plan was abandoned for lack of internal agency support, although I have no way of being sure that it was (Corson 1977, 356-66).

VI

Once the conference got under way the talk of the plane crash and the rumored assassination plot began to subside, slowly fading away in the delegates' consciousness, as they took up their positions and began tackling the official business at hand, both procedural and substantive. From the outset there was tension between the neutralists and the anti-communist allies of the United States. The anti-communist delegates seemed resentful of having to justify

their status as America's client states; they certainly did not appreciate the disdainful tone they detected in the remarks of their self-styled "independent" neighbors.

But they fought back, chiding their neighbors for failing to stand up to the repressive regimes next door while condemning western imperialism. Within a day or two these pro-western leaders from Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, the Philippines, etc., seemed to get the upper hand of the situation in this war of words, effectively tipping the balance in their favor. At least, that's how it looked to *The New York Times*, which was moved to declare that what had started out as a potential "disaster for the West" had now settled into a "useful exercise in international relations."

Ironically, while all this was going on, the man who rose in stature, assuming the role of a *de facto* leader, was none other than the man from China, whose inclusion at the conference had been the very source of apprehension and hostility in some quarters. Zhou seemed to have made a conscious decision not to take notice of this sideshow over who was better than whom, knowing that there was no way he could come out of it unscathed; for, after all, it was the abuses inside Communist China that was what these people were arguing about. Why jump in when everyone seemed content to leave you alone? Zhou decided to lie low whenever the two warring camps went after each other. And that seemed to serve him well. "Reports received here suggest," so went one article, "that Premier Chou Enlai of Communist China is the social lion of the conference."

Even though he was the leader of the world's largest democracy, Prime Minister Nehru had acquired some reputation back home for his disdain for parliamentary wrangling and for his impatience with interminable debates. Whether that reputation had preceded him to the conference or not, Mr. Nehru's annoyance with the proceedings was widely noticed by those participating.

Shortly after the conference had begun Nehru could see how some speakers liked to go on and on, and many delegates could observe how the great man was reacting to this. Well into the conference, as the delegates were looking to the all-important plenary session, the Indian statesman seemed to make a serious blunder by demanding that, in the interest of time, the speeches for the plenary session be filed for inclusion in the published proceedings but not be delivered orally. He found no one seconding his proposal.

Many of these delegates were looking forward to the last meeting, where they would be delivering their prepared speeches in their glorious native costumes, complete with matching hairpieces. The suggestion that these delegates return home after filing copies of their prepared speeches, after having listened to others more inclined to speak than they, somehow came as a rude surprise. Quickly, surprise gave way to anger. The secretary of state from Liberia said what everyone wanted to hear. "But we are a small nation," said Mr. Momolu Dukuly, "and when we speak it is not often that anyone will listen." Besides, he added, "We have come a long way to attend this conference and we would like to be heard."

With an approving nod and a smile from the gentleman from Peking, it was clear that what needed to be said had been said. As Nehru retreated, taking his high-handed suggestion with him, everyone seemed happy again. All the head delegates would get to speak now.

Unfortunately, Pandit Nehru's troubles did not end with this procedural dispute. From the outset there were signs of discontent directed at the great world-class peacemaker. An open challenge to his authority came from a fellow product of British education, Sir John Kotelawala, Ceylon's prime minister, in the form of a hint that the great Nehru had overplayed his hand as the unofficial leader of the proceedings. Realizing how much grief Nehru was getting, his loyal lieutenant V. K. Krishna Menon leaned over to the man sitting next to him, General Carlos Romulo of the Philippines, and whispered: "You will have to excuse the way my boss is acting here. He really is quite inexperienced as far as international conferences are concerned."

Everything Nehru lacked in the way of "people skills" Premier Zhou seemed to have: humility, grace, patience and reassuring accessibility. He was a diplomat who knew his craft. He wanted to win people's hearts and minds without threats and without talking down to them. And he was always busy talking to fellow diplomats. One night he went to see Menon at the latter's quarters, arriving there at midnight; he was found leaving at 3 am.

The day before the adjournment Zhou threw a bombshell of an announcement: that his government was now ready for a meeting with the United States — for "direct bilateral talks," as opposed to a "multi-power conference," so his spokesman clarified to the press afterwards — to discuss all outstanding issues that stood between the two nations. It had all the appearance of a breakthrough; the Chinese leader was now prepared to sit down with his American

counterpart to discuss their differences, and there were no preconditions.

The delegates were overjoyed. The prime minister of Pakistan, America's military ally, Mohammed Ali, thought Zhou's offer was an "excellent thing." Prince Faisal, Premier of Saudi Arabia, remarked of Zhou: "He seems a man of very good character." Or, as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher would say of Mikhail Gorbachev some three decades later, following their first meeting at Number 10 Downing Street when the Russian leader was not yet the head of his government, "I think we can do business with him." Indeed, "I think we can believe him" were the words the reporters heard from Saleh Akil, a member of the Syrian delegation, who then noted: "His whole attitude here has been one of leniency and conciliation."

But Zhou got no response from the United States. He did eventually get to shake hands with an American secretary of state, but that was not for another seventeen years, after the United States had changed its course on the issue of UN membership. From 1950 to 1971 Beijing's application for UN membership was blocked by the United States at every session, which ensured the continued presence of the Nationalist government on the Security Council as one of the five veto-wielding permanent members. But in 1971 the United States decided to abandon that policy, thereby allowing the General Assembly to admit the PRC as a replacement of the Republic of China in the world body. After relenting on the replacement issue the Nixon administration tried to get the General Assembly to let Taiwan keep its seat in the Assembly alongside the PRC, though not on the Security Council. That motion failed. The government on Taiwan was expelled from the world body by a vote of 76 to 35 with 17 abstentions.

When Premier Zhou and President Nixon signed the historic "Shanghai Communique" the following year, normalizing relations between the two great powers and pledging themselves to a "One China" policy, China had barely begun its internal house-cleaning after several years of crippling ideological madness known as the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." President Nixon and his secretary of state, Dr. Henry Kissinger, had calculated that normalizing relations with Asia's most potent check on Soviet power was in America's national interest, and China's internal troubles hardly entered into their calculations.

VII

It is difficult to know what all was going through Premier Zhou's mind at the Bandung Conference, when he was courting the friendship of his fellow diplomats, urging everyone to come visit him. But we can safely assume that he wanted to get some trade relations established quickly with various Middle Eastern and African nations, starting with Egypt, whose young ruler seemed to fascinate him greatly. And he was only too glad to offer aid and encouragement to any colonial peoples willing to put up a fight to gain their freedom and independence, which a succession of American presidents looked upon with some apprehension. Whatever the actual impact of the PRC's Third World diplomacy, the five-year period from the Bandung Conference to 1960 was nothing short of remarkable for the global de-colonization process, which gave us 40 new members in the General Assembly, including most of the African nations as we know them today.

A brief return to the conference may give us some further flavor of what went on there in that remarkable week in 1955, at the height of the Cold War, in a city of one million, much favored by tourists, perched on the breathtakingly beautiful Preanger Plateau, surrounded by luxuriant towering peaks. In the evenings the delegates actively socialized, dining out and enjoying themselves. The key players took turns hosting special dinners for invited guests at their quarters. Premier Zhou had one dinner scheduled for the night before the final banquet. At that party the guests were politely asked not to talk business; I would guess that he urged his guests to get better acquainted, since they'd all be heading home soon.

Apparently, the guests obliged. "The nearest thing to political discussion at the dinner," so reported one journalist, was a "renewed invitation from Mr. Chou to all his guests to visit China." He had been seen inviting people to visit him in China ever since his arrival at the conference, starting with Col. Nasser. Zhou appears to have seen an important potential ally in Nasser since before the two had arrived at the conference. It was Prime Minister Nasser, not yet president, that Zhou had gone to meet at Rangoon, and Zhou was found urging the Egyptian leader to visit China more than once before the conference adjourned. Nasser was said to have responded each time with a smile.

Throughout the conference Zhou showed a talent for making all participating delegates feel that they were important and that they had his sympathetic ear. They were given the impression that this man from China was genuinely interested in hearing what they had to say. As an unofficial floor-manager he seemed keen in discerning consensus amid disagreements, a remarkable feat considering his language barrier. Zhou spoke French but not English; and English was the lingua franca for the occasion. And Zhou had both the humility and self-assurance needed to credit fellow leaders with anything that seemed worth noting and celebrating.

In the end, it was Zhou's masterful diplomacy that seemed to rescue the conference from slipping into irrelevancy with an acrimonious contest of will between two unyielding blocs: the neutrals poking fun at the client-states and the anti-communists chiding the neutrals for failing to recognize Red China for what it was, i. e., a vast, suffocating, totalitarian labor camp undergoing immense suffering.

As the delegates prepared to depart it was clear to all that the conference had been more than a harmless "exercise in international relations." The important thing about the conference was not the communique itself or Zhou's own "Five Principles," his agenda for peaceful coexistence, which was warmly embraced by all, much to the chagrin of our State Department. Rather, it was the demonstration that these former colonies of Asia and Africa were quite capable of a constructive dialogue on their own and that they might in the coming years have something to offer in the way of promoting a peaceful and just world order, one which had eluded them as the military competition between the superpowers intensified. And they seemed agreed that in Zhou Enlai the right kind of leader had come along to help get the much-needed conversation going.

Zhou had once greatly impressed General George C. Marshall when Marshall was mediating between the two warring factions during the Chinese civil war, the Nationalists and the Communists. The superlative "the greatest statesman of our time," describing Zhou Enlai, may have started with Marshall. Years later another Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, would match Marshall's superlative with one of his own, in the wake of the famous "Ping Pong Diplomacy" that led to the normalization of relations between the United States and China some seventeen years after Bandung. "Never in all my years have I met anybody as

impressive,” said the American scholar-statesman as he spoke to a friend, adding, “What a mind!” (Hersh 1983, 492).

VIII

Zhou Enlai died in January of 1976 at the age of 78. When I visited China in 1982, the first of seven trips to China over the years, I was talking to a group of Chinese people at Tien An Men Square just outside the famous gate leading to the Forbidden City. They were telling me what their late leader Zhou Enlai had meant to them in life and what great affection and esteem he had enjoyed in their hearts all through their lives. It was clear that Zhou had been very much a people’s statesman, like no other. Then, the talk shifted to the death of another great leader in September of that same year, the father of the People’s Republic, or, as he would allow his people to call him while he was alive, the “Great Helmsman.” The crowd recalled a very long line of mourners filing to have a glimpse of their beloved Chairman Mao lying in state. I couldn’t resist wanting to know if they remembered a line of mourners for Premier Zhou as well, given that it was winter when he died. “Oh, yes!” came the answer. “But was the line just as long?” Then, after they’d looked at one another as if to search for the best answer possible, they allowed one of them to reply, “Oh, yes!” Then, another one jumped in to say, “No, no, much longer!” “Much longer,” it was agreed.

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