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R E V I E W

Bandung Conference 70 Years On: Visions of Decolonisation

for a Multipolar World Order

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This special issue aims to reflect on the legacies of the Bandung Conference in its 70th anniversary for the emerging multipolar world order. Seven articles in this special issue unpacks the many legacies of the Bandung Conference: from the epistemic visions of a new international order based on self-determination, sovereign equality, and postcolonial justice to the reshaping of the foreign policy of the 'global south' countries. We build on the legacies and pitfalls of the Bandung Conference to rethink what it means by, and what should be done for, the decolonisation agenda in world politics. We argue that the Bandung Conference has been able, primarily, to rethink the structure of international politics by embracing three visions of decolonisation: a political vision of territorial sovereignty and self-determination, an economic vision of equality and justice, and an epistemic vision for cultural and intellectual liberation from colonial legacies. However, these visions of decolonisation are threatened by the return of great power politics, sphere of influence, and the further marginalisation of the global south in an emerging multipolar world order. We argue that the global south needs to use opportunities from the multipolar world order to reassert their voices and agencies while at the same time critical of, and rejecting, the underlying imperial logic of the great powers. This special issue lays out some lessons from the Bandung Conference for a multipolar world order in three key sites of new global struggle: a political struggle to defend sovereignty, an economic struggle for global justice, and an intellectual struggle for equal knowledge production. These are the new Bandung visions for a multipolar world order.

Keywords: *Bandung Conference, Decolonisation, International Order, Global Justice, Multipolar World Order*

Introduction

In his famous speech at the 1955 Asia Africa Conference in Bandung, Indonesia ("the Bandung Conference"), Chinese Premier Zhou En-Lai declared that "..the rule of colonialism in this region has not yet come to an end, and new colonialists are attempting take the place of the old ones."

Having arrived from a dramatic escape from an attempted assassination, he led the Chinese delegation to the conference and conveyed a forceful message for all participants. For Zhou, after the end of the Second World War, "…[n]ot a few of the Asian and African peoples are still leading a life of colonial slavery. Not a few of the Asian and African peoples are still subjected to racial discrimination and deprived of human rights…. We need to develop our countries independently with no outside interference and in accordance with the will of the people." (Zhou 1955).

It has been 70 years after the Bandung Conference, but the call from Zhou –along with other leaders of 'the Third World' in 1955 has still found resonances in contemporary international politics. The Bandung Conference, indeed, has paved the way for global decolonisation. There are 116 states who obtained their independence after the conference, followed by the call for a 'new international economic order' and 'non-alignment' during the Cold War followed after the Conference. Nevertheless, there have also been denial of self-determination after the Conference — from the long struggle of Palestinian statehood to the treatment of indigenous people in settler-colonial societies. Colonialism, therefore, is not dead, and there are still homeworks to advance decolonisation in a new multipolar international order.

Addressing the contemporary challenges necessitate a rethinking of what *decolonisation* means in contemporary international politics. This special issue aims to reflect on the legacies of the Bandung Conference by rethinking what 'decolonisation' means in the study of World Politics. By reflecting on the contemporary legacies of the Bandung Conference in its 70th anniversary, we argue that decolonisation does not only mean a defence of not only sovereignty and sovereign equality, but also dismantling of an unjust economic system that only enriches one country or social class and sustains global hierarchy, as well as a dismantling of intellectual and cultural hegemony that marginalises, epistemically, the expertise of the global south scholars and practices of knowledge production from the global south. These visions have implications to our understanding of international politics. The multipolar world order, however, has raised questions whether these visions are still relevant and what strategies that the global south should envision to respond to challenges of the contemporary multipolar world order.

This introductory article offers a new conceptual framework to understand the Bandung visions of decolonisation and its contemporary challenges in the emerging multipolar world order. The first section sets out the scene by discussing the visions of decolonisation from the Bandung Conference. The second section brings Bandung's vision for decolonisation to the wider efforts for decolonising the study of international politics. The third section analyses the challenges of decolonisation under a multipolar world order. The final section offers a new Bandung spirit for a multipolar world order by reflecting on contributions of articles in this Special Issue.

Bandung's Visions of Decolonisation

The Bandung Conference was premised on a normative vision for an egalitarian international order. Scholars have argued that Bandung Conference has powerfully brought a central vision of postcolonial worldmaking: a project to transform the existing hierarchical international order — underpinned by legacies of colonialism and imperialism — into an egalitarian vision of political, economic, and cultural order (Quah 2025, Benabdallah 2024). The Bandung Conference presented a vision of worldmaking to dismantle international hierarchy centred on *self-determination*. At the Bandung Conference, according to Getachew (2019: 88), anticolonial nationalist leaders have endorsed the self-determination as a collective rights of peoples and nations, which made it "a necessary condition for individual human rights." In so doing, they have made a case for a new world order based on the *equality of all nations* free from colonialism and imperialism (Utama 2025; Pham and Shilliam 2016). This demand ultimately challenged the Wilsonian vision of self-determination, outlined by Woodrow Wilson in 1919 and preserved by the League of Nations, which outlined that self-determinations may only be granted for societies who are *civilised enough* to advance their developments, which clearly established a hierarchy of nations based on standards of civilisation (Manela 2007, Spanu 2020).

This normative vision of egalitarian international order has three key dimensions. First, the Bandung Conference embraced political equality for all nations in world politics regardless of race or status of civilisation. The basis of this political equality was the rejection of colonialism and, as Jack Shield has shown in this special issue, the logic of territoriality that had proliferated in the early 20th century after the First World War through Wilsonian self-determination. By tracing the longer historical origins of the Bandung Conference, Shield argues that Bandung Conference articulates a logic of "territorialisation", in which its participants articulate a vision of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism through the form of nation-state. This logic evolved from a de-territorialised and diffused vision of anti-imperialism articulated by its predecessor, the League against Imperialism, which was concerned primarily to dismantle Western imperialism. This process of territorialisation was essential in shaping Bandung's political, economic, and cultural vision of decolonisation.

Decolonisation, for Bandung Conference, demands an equal place for non-Western peoples in a new international system characterised by "nation-state monoculture", where membership in the international system is determined by territories embedded in the nation-state. The Final Communique of Bandung Conference has boldly declared that, "..colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should speedily be brought to an end; and… the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights" (Problem of Dependent People, point 1c and 1d). By rejecting colonialism, the Bandung Conference was able to put forward political agenda for decolonisation

by, primarily, "...declaring its support of the cause of freedom and independence for all such peoples, and… calling upon the powers concerned to grant freedom and independence to such peoples" (Problem of Dependent People, point 1c and 1d).

Two political ideas underpinned this egalitarian vision of decolonisation, namely a defence of territorial integrity and sovereign equality. The Final Communique has clearly established the importance of defending territorial integrity as the core elements of decolonisation. As Quinton-Brown (2024) has argued, participants of Bandung Conference defended territorial integrity as a means to reject the looming great power interventionism during the early Cold War era, which resembled the new logic of colonial expansion. This was clearly articulated in the ten principles, which called for, "abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country" (point 4) "respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively (point 5), "abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers" (point 6), and "refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country' (point 7). In defending their territorial integrity, they embrace sovereign equality, in which all nations should be treated as equal under international law (see also Eslava, Fakhri, and Nesiah 2017, Basu-Meillish and Zachariades 2023). This was illustrated in the bold declaration of the Bandung Conference for, "recognition of the equality of all races and of the equality of all nations, large and small" (point 3).

Second, the Final Communique of the Bandung Conference also outlined three economic foundations, namely development, economic cooperation between Asian and African countries, and a just and fair international economic order. The Final Communique has called for strengthening, "...economic co-operation among the participating countries on the basis of mutual interest and respect for national sovereignty." (Economic Co-operation, point 1). In calling for economic cooperation, the Bandung Conference acknowledges the need for not only technical assistance among Asian and African countries, but also a stable commodity trade, international prices, and demand for primary commodities (Economic Co-operation, point 4-5). In so doing, the Conference called for diversification of export trade by processing raw materials before export, strengthening of intra-regional trade, and promotion of international trade that would support development. These proposals, nevertheless, need support from the United Nations and major powers in world politics, which eventually laid the basis for a call for New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s (Benjamin 2015, Weber and Winanti 2016).

Finally, there is also an aspect of cultural decolonisation. The Final Communique has acknowledged the importance of recovering the rich cultural traditions of Asian and African countries, which had been suppressed by colonialism, and embraced mutual learning between Asian and African nations. The Bandung Conference, therefore, called for broadening decolonisation

to the cultural and intellectual sphere, which requires the dismantling of cultural and intellectual superiority of the colonisers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019, Mignolo 2011). It was against this backdrop that the conference recommended strengthening educational cooperation between Asian and African countries with three key directions: the acquisition of knowledge of each other's country, mutual cultural exchange, and exchange of information (Cultural Co-Operation, point 5). One manifestation of this cultural cooperation, as Christopher Geralle has shown in this Special Issue, is *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* scholarship from the Indonesian government, which enabled students from developing countries to learn in Indonesian Higher Education institutions.

Decolonising International Relations

These aspects of the Bandung Conference have brought important legacies not only for global decolonisation, but also for the wider efforts to decolonise the way we think about world politics. We note that the Bandung Conference has inspired a rethinking of how we should study International Relations in three ways. At the 'macro' level, Bandung Conference has inspired us to tell a different story of international order. This enables IR scholars to challenge the Eurocentric views of International Relations by engaging with alternative epistemologies and sources of knowledge from the complex realities and subjectivities of the global south. Unpacking alternative epistemologies, in turn would open up more spaces of inquiries in the

study of International Relations by looking at everyday practices and politics, which ground the aspirations of decolonisation to alternative knowledge production process at the 'micro' level. From this perspective, learning from the Bandung Conference has enabled scholars to continuously interrogate power relations, knowledge hierarchies, and global governance structures that would contribute to advance a more equitable international order.

A New Story of International Order

IR scholars have regarded Bandung Conference — instead of the standard 'Westphalian Peace Conference' or the end of the Second World War, as a birthplace of modern international order. For Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson (2011), International Relations as a discipline has been haunted by a 'myth of Westphalia', which assumes that modernity began after the Peace of Westphalia in the 17th century. Other views put the 'benchmark date' later at the 19th century or the end of the Second World War (Buzan and Lawson 2014, 2016, Waltz 1979, Ikenberry 2009). These assumptions have missed the point that these 'benchmark dates' were almost exclusively European in nature. European colonialism has rendered impossible the proper recognition of Asian and African agents in the history of modern international borders, and thus sustained the Eurocentric narrative that put Euro-American agents at the centre of modern international order (Hobson 2012, Kayaoglu 2010).

Therefore, an alternative view has emerged to regard the Bandung Conference

as the foundational moment for modern international order. The Bandung Conference has been exceptional in bringing about the global 'decolonisation' that would enable Asian and African countries to be regarded as agents in world politics (Umar 2019, Shilliam and Pham 2016, Eslava and Fakhri 2017). Bandung's principles—anti-colonialism, non-alignment, and South-South cooperation—also offered an alternative to Cold War bipolarity and enabled the emergence of the 'Third World' as a political bloc amid US-Soviet contestation (Phillips 2016, Guan 2018). Bandung Conference also envisions an international order based on 'global pluralism' — equality of all countries regardless of its economic position and ideology — rooted in a shared colonial past, with a transformation agenda to structure international political and economic order (Wu 2023, see also Dunne, Devetak, and Nurhayati 2016).

The Bandung Conference has also paved more avenues for the emergence of new blocs — the Third World — that reconfigure the structure of global political contestation during and after the Cold War, as well as new political initiatives such as the Group of 77, New International Economic Order, the Non-Aligned Movement (Dinkel 2018, Alvian, Putrowidjoyo, and Fadhila 2024, Gray and Gills 2016). Against this backdrop, Bandung Conference has become a key moment for 'solidarist internationalism' that reconciles the Asian and African countries under a single banner of intercontinental solidarity (Weber and Winanti 2016, Hongoh 2016). The Bandung Conference also played a role in the development of international law, particularly those related to the matters of the Third World countries (Eslava, Fakhri, and Nesiah 2017).

Challenging Eurocentrism

IR scholars have also discussed the Bandung Conference as a moment of resistance against colonialism, which later inspired many forms of global decolonisation agenda. Mignolo (2011), for example, has forcefully argued that the Bandung Conference provided options for the global south countries for epistemic delinking: one way to intellectually break free from the dark legacies of Western colonialism (see also Shilliam and Pham 2016). For postcolonial and decolonial scholars in IR, the Bandung Conference offers new ways of thinking about international politics by, primarily, dismantling the epistemic hierarchies embedded in mainstream IR discipline (Hakim, Sugiono, and Mas'oed 2021, Umar 2024).

Postcolonial and Decolonial IR scholars have been critical of the representation of non-Western societies as 'other', and broader moves have been made to recentre non-Western voices in IR (Ling 2002, Buzan and Acharya 2010, Seth 2013). This Western-centrism is not simply reproduced through the domination of Western scholarship, but also involves gatekeeping of non-Western scholars in the global avenues of knowledge production (Umar 2024, Cho 2023). In addition, IR as an academic discipline is also still centred in the West where the basic institutional infrastructure of knowledge production — professional association, academic journals, conferences, and PhD scholarship — are

based, whilst at the same time marginalising those in the global south (Waheed and Malik 2024, Gani and Marshall 2022).

By bringing Bandung Conference — and its legacies — at the forefront of academic conversation in IR, scholars have attempted to question and challenge the Eurocentric foundations that center Western civilisational and racial superiority (Capan 2017, Sabaratnam 2020, Sen 2023). In so doing, they advocated for methodological pluralism and centering Global South perspectives (Picq 2013, Viramontes 2022). These scholars also argue that dominant IR paradigms marginalize postcolonial experiences by privileging Western-centric analyses of sovereignty, security, and development (Tripathi 2021, Vogel et. al 2024). This critique aligns with broader decolonial efforts to diversify knowledge production and challenge the assumption that Western theoretical models offer universal explanations for global politics (Chakrabarty 2008, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019, Alejandro 2018).

Everyday Politics and the Global South

This engagement has in turn enabled IR scholars to open up new spaces of inquiries to unpack complexities of international political realities, primarily by introducing an interdisciplinary approach to decolonization. This approach resonates with broader aesthetic and emotional turn in IR, which emphasize how knowledge and representation shape global hierarchies (Bleiker 2001, Hutchison 2016). Scholars, for example, has assessed that International Relations is not only about 'state matters', but also include

on-the-ground practices like everyday protection of refugees (Prabandari and Adiputra 2019, Missbach and Adiputera 2021), or the role of new technologies in society — from platform economies, Internet of Things, to artificial intelligence — in reproducing postcolonial inequalities (Yuana 2024, see also Ghosh et. al., 2021).

This development is important not only for IR as a discipline as such, but also to understand how practices of injustice and legacies of colonialism have been perpetuated in *everyday politics,* and not only in the relations among states. Understanding science and technology as a part of 'everyday' international political issues is crucial to understanding state-centric bias in IR and foregrounds non-human agency, aesthetic practices, and technological infrastructures (Yuana, Madasari, & Hadiyantono, 2025). Understanding everyday practices is also important to understand refugee protections. As Prabandari (2023) has shown the relative absence of robust refugee policies from the state has enabled the humanitarian roles citizens to step up with humanitarian protections (see also Kuncoro and Prabandari 2024).

This engagement with decolonization extends beyond theory to applied research in energy transitions, climate justice, and disasters. With a complex geographical landscape, Indonesia faces an equally complex challenge environmental problems, which are entangled with social, cultural, and political dynamics in the changing society (Triyanti et. al., 2023). One of these issues is related to access to water and, more broadly.

According to Marwa (2024) in her research in Jakarta's urban settlement, the water problem in Jakarta actually intersects with gender, social relations, and economic redistribution. In this sense, an environmental issue — more specifically water — has become an issue of environmental justice that requires more-than-technical solutions (Lobina, Weghmann, and Marwa 2023). These stories thus show the global intersections between the 'local problem' of the global south with the wider issues of global justice and inequalities.

Similar lessons can be learned from other problems recently faced by the global south. The COVID-19 pandemic also reflect the collective vulnerability of the poor, which has been rooted with the wider issues of global inequalities and incapabilities of the global south to deal with health emergency and vaccination (Mas'udi and Winanti 2020, Umar and Wicaksono 2020). Similarly, studies on energy transitions highlight how the global south navigates geopolitical constraints and climate finance, often within neocolonial structures (Winanti et al., 2021, Nurhidayah et. al., 2024). In resource-rich countries (including Indonesia), the issue of energy transitions often involve many social, political, and economic considerations due to collective vulnerabilities of people and absence of comprehensive state responsibility to deal with energy transition (Winanti and Hanif 2020).

To sum up, Bandung Conference has opened up a new possibility for 'epistemic and cultural decolonisation': to think about world politics differently by centring the agencies of postcolonial societies. The Bandung Conference is not simply a statement of 'decolonisation' in terms of state independence. As Christopher Geralle has discussed in this special issue, Bandung Conference also entailed *intellectual liberation:* disrupting Western hegemony in knowledge production that marginalises non-Western peoples. Bandung Conference, therefore, it is also a broader vision for 'decolonising' the multiple scales of global politics: from the global power asymmetries the global politics and economy to the reproduction of global injustice in everyday politics.

The Emerging Multipolar World Order

In 2007, the global financial crisis hit two global financial centres - the Wall Street and the City of London — and led most of the Western countries in economic crisis. This moment thus marked the slow decline of the Western-led liberal international order after the Cold War. The second decade of the 21st century also witnessed the rise of China and its 'alternative' forms of partnership with the global south, as well as the more assertive Russia to regain its influence in its Eurasian neighbour. At the same time, these countries established transregional groupings that also involve global south countries, including BRICS+ (established in 2006), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Collective Security Treaty Organization, and Eurasian Economic Union (Kireeva et. al 2019, Kuznetsov 2022). Furthermore, the election of President Donald Trump and the rise of far-right movements across Europe steadily accelerates this trend, particularly

with the the rifts between United States and its Western allies (notably EU and Canada), tariff wars, threats to annex Greenland and Canada, as well as ongoing wars in Gaza and Ukraine with no end in sight.

Scholars have characterised this emerging trend as a 'multipolar international order', in which there are multiple powers with their own influence and logics of engagement who want to shape the rules of international order (Wijaya and Jayasuriya 2024, Dolan 2018, see also Hakim et. al 2021). Three key aspects characterise this new, emerging multipolar international order. The first aspect is the rise of new global powers. The 2007 financial crisis has not only revealed a severe capitalist crisis, but marked the changing of material conditions wherein global economic growth moved from the G7 countries to the so-called emerging economies. As early as 2010, OECD (2010) had acknowledged that there was a shifting wealth which resulted in changing geography of the global economy. They predicted that the emerging economies would control 60% of the global economy by 2030 and urged the developed countries to strengthen the North-South relations through various mechanisms, most notably the G20 (Hakim, 2019).

The second aspect is the rise of global strategic competition and transregional cooperations across the world. This is associated with the decline of US unilateralism, enjoyed since the end of World War II, and the post-Cold War unipolar order. Economically, the rise of China, and its global economic initiatives economic groupings, has not only directly challenged the US dominance but also shaped economies and political dynamics in the regions, especially in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Pacific (Yuliantoro and Dinarto 2019, Yuliantoro 2021, Xuetong 2018). In the meantime, at least since 2013 Russia has challenged the US-NATO alliance militarily and forced the former to build a strategic alliance with China in various ongoing and potential conflict zones (Kortunov 2020). Such a strategic competition has brought about geopolitical tensions in which the nexus of security and economy is increasingly intertwined in transforming post-unipolar world order.

The third aspect is the redefinition of roles of the global south countries amid the rise of multiple new emerging powers. Tectonic dislocations of world politics, as mentioned in first and second points, have opened up the new space for redefinition of the political roles of among the Global South countries. With the decline of Western liberal hegemony, a multipolar world order has provided the global south options to choose its alignment with states that support its interest. The multipolar world order is not only dominated by great powers — the United States, Russia and China — but also witnessed the rise of regional powers who actively negotiate the current international order, particularly across Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Bajpai and Laksmana 2023, Goddard 2018). These changing material conditions amid a reordering of international order have opened the spaces for the redefinition of the role of global south, which has been previously marginalised during the

Cold War and in the post-Cold War liberal international order.

Nevertheless, the emergence of multipolar world order does not necessarily lead to consolidation of the global south. The rise of China has led to a new ontological security dilemma of Southeast Asian countries, in which Southeast Asian countries are divided over who to engage with in order to secure regional order (Umar and Santoso 2023). Indeed, following the waves of decolonisation and neoliberal globalisation, the global south is still embedding itself within the old world political-economic structures by creating dependence with the Western countries (Levander and Mignolo 2011, Grovogui 2011). In a multipolar world order, this pattern of dependence can still be exploited with great powers who want to side with the global south for their own interest. Countries like Russia and China, while claiming to be "allies of the global south", did have their own interests that contradict the interest - or the belief held by - global south countries. It is evident from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which violates a small state's basic rights for sovereignty (Wardhani and Dharmaputra 2024).

It is in this central issue that the core of the Bandung Spirit — the decolonisation of world politics — is urgently reinvented and contextualised within the current transformation of the world order (Prasad 2014). In the past, proponents of the Bandung Conference had met some pitfalls in advancing the agenda for the third world in the aftermath of the conference. Even though third world countries have been able to propose initiatives to decolonise international economic order - including through the creation of the Group of 77 and the New International Economic Order — they failed to advance their agenda amidst the waves of neoliberalism since the 1980s (Golub 2013, Benjamin 2015). As such, the global south remains entangled in asymmetric economic relations that constrain its broader pathways to delink from Western colonial legacies. As Mas'oed (2023) has critically discussed, state independence does not always equal full sovereignty, as colonial legacies persist in various forms: from the unjust global economic institutions, unfair trade policies, and governance frameworks sustain neocolonial dependencies (see also Kvangraven 2021).

Thus, changing material conditions and the spaces of contestation require the global south to renew its solidarity and collective consciousness to challenge the imperial logics of great power politics. To establish collective consciousness, the global south needs to cultivate a specific political project to navigate the current multipolar world order. The global south needs to challenge emerging power structures that shape not only patterns of interactions in world politics (including the global south position in it) but also the practices of knowledge production in a way that exploit the global south for the interest of any great powers, whatever form it is. Without clear agenda setting and emancipatory projects to transform the current multipolar order, the global south would continuously be mediocre in global politics.

The New Bandung Vision for Multipolar World Order

This special issue aims to tackle this intellectual and political challenge by revisiting the legacies of the Bandung Conference in its 70 years anniversary. We use the 70 years anniversary of the Bandung Conference to lay out a new agenda for global decolonisation to navigate the emerging multipolar world order. Articles in this special issue reflect on the contemporary challenges of the Bandung Conference for a multipolar international order in three key sites of global struggle: a political struggle to defend territorial sovereignty and non-interference, an economic struggle for global justice and redistribution of public goods, and an intellectual struggle for equal knowledge production.

The first site of the struggle is political and diplomatic struggle to defend state sovereignty. Jack Shield begins by presenting what was the most significant legacy of the Bandung Conference: territorial sovereignty. Participants of the Bandung Conference have wholeheartedly propose and support the recognition of territorial sovereignty as the basic principles of international order. To defend territorial sovereignty, global south countries need three key aspects: rights for self-determination for people under colonialism, sovereign equality under international law, and non-intervention as well as denunciation of illegal use of force. The clear agenda of the global south is to defend this right from great powers' interference — whoever it is — while at the same time advancing peaceful coexistence among great powers.

Defending territorial sovereignty and sovereign equality in world politics necessitate a clear diplomatic strategy of the global south. However, global south countries face a dilemma in devising relevant foreign policy and diplomatic strategies for a multipolar world order. Aldi Haydar Mulia, Rama Ardhia Prastita, and Muhammad Daffa Arnanda explore Indonesia's foreign policy dilemma between decolonisation and development. Assessing the history of Indonesia's foreign policy since the Bandung era, the authors argue that Indonesia articulated, and later shifted, its foreign policy commitment since the Bandung Conference. While the Bandung Conference was able to challenge the neocolonial structure of world politics, its vision was not consistently applied by its proponents. By looking at Indonesia's foreign policy, the authors argue that the lack of clarity and coherent vision Indonesia's foreign policy vision has hindered the full articulation of decolonisation in world politics, combined with the Cold War and domestic instability that President Sukarno has faced in the 1960s.

Faris Rahmadian, Otto Hospes, and Katrien Termeer found a similar dilemma faced by Southeast Asian countries in devising diplomatic strategies. By conducting a systematic literature review of diplomatic strategies pursued by Southeast Asian countries since their independence, the authors argue that the diplomatic strategies of Southeast Asian countries have been shaped by, among others, their past histories of colonialism and neutrality in international politics. However, these diplomatic strategies are

limited to defend Southeast Asia from great powers' interference. Increased tensions between the United States, Russia, and China, combined with disunity among global south countries due to close relations with either great powers pose a dilemma as to how a unified global south strategy can be achieved.

The second struggle is the economic call for just economic order. Muhammad Ikhwan Nuril Anwar argues in this special issue that Indonesia's development discourse during President Joko Widodo did not reflect the spirit of economic decolonisation as articulated by the Bandung Conference. Instead, Joko Widodo articulates development policies that sideline local communities, overlook sustainable practices, and worsen environmental inequalities. Anwar shows this tendency by undertaking an ecofeminist analysis of three prominent megaprojects, including the *Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN)* new capital city project, nickel industry downstreaming, and the Food Estate program. These projects have not only had domestic repercussions, including in social and environmental issues, but also had increased Indonesia's reliance on external partners who fund the programs, particularly China.

The third struggle is the intellectual struggle for equal knowledge production. Even though there have been attempts for epistemic decolonisation, especially to delink the discipline of International Relations from its Western-centric intellectual hegemony, the West still dominates the sphere of knowledge production. To deal with these challenges, global south countries need to turn to key policy proposals outlined in the

Final Communique of the Bandung Conference to improve *south-south cooperation.* One strategy is to improve the economic, cultural, and educational relations between the global south countries. Reflecting on *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang,* a program by the Indonesian government to give scholarships for students from global south partners, Christopher Paller Gerale highlights one overlooked aspect of south-south cooperation: a strong partnership needs to be cultivated from below by involving citizens. Gerale argues that the KNB scholarship program fosters South-South cooperation, disrupts Western-centric knowledge hierarchies, and contributes to capacity building in the Global South. This program brings the cultural co-operation vision of the Bandung Conference further by prioritizing mutual respect, equitable development, and the decolonization of knowledge among the host institutions and scholarship recipients.

Finally, we need to note that the Bandung Conference was not perfect. One striking issue is the Palestine Question, which is primarily an issue of continuing colonial legacies under the form of land occupation (Sayegh 1965, Nabulsi 2023). In this special issue, Nurul Fajriyah and Siti Muti'ah Setiawati highlight one unfinished political agenda of the Bandung Conference: the Palestinian independence. Indeed, many participants of the Bandung Conference — particularly delegates of the Arab countries — have voiced support for the independence in the United Nations (Samour 2017). By analysing Indonesia's view and support towards Palestinian independence, the authors argue

that global south solidarity is essential in supporting the struggle for Palestinian independence, even though the efforts have not been successful in bringing about the rights for self-determination for Palestinians. Fajriyah and Setiawati's analysis highlights another pivotal issue in advancing south-south cooperation in a multipolar world order, namely humanitarian solidarity.

However, in a multipolar world order, expressing solidarity alone is not enough to push for a political change in global politics. This special issue has brought a final reflection: a global solidarity needs to be pushed further to establish a concrete political agenda to negotiate the collective interest of the global south with the emerging great powers. For example, to resolve the Palestine Question, Indonesia — and other global south countries — should advance a more concrete political agenda to negotiate Palestinian independence with the great powers, especially those who currently support Israel. Similarly, the global south needs to have a collective stance to stand up to Donald Trump's unjust tariff and the looming US-China trade war, which could affect the development agenda of the global south. Thus, while a multipolar world order may create an opportunity for the global south to engage with multiple great powers in world politics, a real political change will only materialise with a consistent political agenda from a *united* global south. This is the ultimate lesson from the Bandung Conference 70 years ago for the contemporary multipolar world order.

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From the League against Imperialism to Bandung:

The Triumph of Territoriality

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In his inaugurating speech at the Bandung Conference in 1955, Sukarno plucked out the League against Imperialism as an intellectual and organisational forebear. Yet, while this rightly situated Bandung in a longer history of anti-colonial activity, the discontinuities between these two conferences are equally illuminating. This article sets out to establish one of the legacies of Bandung by tracing backwards rather than forwards. I argue that while the League against Imperialism represented a more diffuse and de-territorialised vision of anti-imperialism, by the time of Bandung, the route from anti-colonialism to post-colonialism was clear: it ran through the territorial nation-state. Thus, the principal contribution of this article to this special issue is to draw attention to this legacy of territorialisation in Bandung. I trace some principal international 'pulls' that drove the push towards territoriality. Moreover, I contest the characterisation of Bandung as creating a "pluralist" international order since it rested on this consolidation around a territorial nation-state monoculture in global politics.

Keywords: *Bandung; anti-colonial nationalism; territoriality; international order; decolonisation; league against imperialism*

Introduction

In his inaugurating speech at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955 (henceforth 'Bandung'), Indonesian President Sukarno recognised the earlier anti-colonial foundations of the gathering, recalling the connection to "the Conference of the "League against Imperialism and Colonialism" which was held in Brussels almost thirty years ago." Yet, the situation at Bandung was vastly different from that surrounding The League against Imperialism (LAI), as Sukarno also recognised, saying "But that was a meeting thousands of miles away, amidst foreign people, in a foreign country, in a foreign continent…Today the contrast is great. Our nations and countries are colonies no more. Now we are free, sovereign and independent. We are again masters in our own house" (Sukarno, 1955). Indeed, the contrast between the Conferences *is* great – not just in being either side of independence, but in the shifting relationship that each bore to territory.

The modern international system is today comprised of sovereign states. More-

over, these sovereign states are organised according to the principle of "territoriality". That is, states claim exclusive jurisdiction over a clearly defined geographic space. States are assumed to have, in Herz's words, "a hard shell" rendering them "secure from foreign penetration" (1957, p. 474). Anti-imperialism and decolonization did not always have a world of sovereign territorial states as its imagined endpoint, however.

I argue that whereas the LAI featured a broad and diverse array of anti-colonial internationalisms with an ambivalent relationship to territory, by the time of Bandung a clear territorial 'narrowing' had taken place. In 1927, the form of anti-imperial internationalism championed at the Brussels Congress was much more fluid and not necessarily attached to the nation-state. Burgeoning nationalist movements in the colonised countries had only become identifiably political conscious since the early 1920s, and the Comintern's "united front" policy enabled a broad-based anti-imperial coalition to flourish. By 1955, the triumph of the nation-state as the acceptable model of post-coloniality was clearly observable – both in the actors and principles promoted at the Bandung Conference. It was attended by representatives of sovereign governments and called for "Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations" (2009, p. 102) as the second principle of the final communique. Bandung made it clear: the end of empire would not be pursued through a global East-West coalition that also took aim at capitalism, but through a series of national revolutions that secured the sovereign

independence of territorial units.

Considered thus, one of the significant legacies that it bequeathed to international order was the tethering of decolonization to the nation-state. In making this argument, I do not mean to deny that there were revolutionary faces of Bandung. It has stood for decades as a potent symbol and (unfulfilled) promise of anti-imperialism, peaceful coexistence and anti-racism. To date, however, the acceptance of territoriality implicit in Bandung has remained one of its underacknowledged legacies and therefore worthy of scholarly attention.

This article proceeds in three sections. The first surveys existing literature on Bandung's legacies for international order. It notes some useful contributions, from both IR scholars and historians, while demonstrating that a neglected focus thus far has been the shifting character of anti-imperialism from Brussels to Bandung, and the embrace of territoriality. The second section lays out the theoretical side of the argument that part of Bandung's legacy was one of territorialisation within the nation-state. Principally, I draw on Rahul Rao's argument that decolonization could be considered as an extended moment of 'global solidarism', along with Reus-Smit's notion of the 'recognition function' of international orders. Reviving the English School debates on 'solidarism' and 'pluralism', I contest the characterisation of Bandung as one of creation of a global pluralist international society. In the third and longest section, I embark upon some historical narrative; reconstructing some of the principal international 'pulls' that drove

the push towards territorialisation. After first setting out the radical openness of the "international moment" (Raza et al., 2015) of the interwar period and the LAI, I identify a set of geopolitical 'pulls' towards territoriality. These resulted in the waning currency of non-territorial possibilities like the discourses of federalism, pan-Asianism, pan-Islamism and workers' internationals, to name but a few. By the time that this historical excursus arrives at Bandung, the members are those of fully sovereign nations. Though Bandung was certainly itself a site of, and host of, varied internationalisms, there was far less latitude in post-colonial possibilities, and the political subjectivity seemingly prescribed by international order was very clearly the nation-state.

Disciplining Bandung: Its place in International Relations

This section seeks to situate this argument in existing literature. It proceeds in three sections, progressively narrowing in focus. The first looks broadly at literature on Bandung and the tendency to focus on legacies of Bandung by tracing forward, not backward. The second section addresses some of the works that establish a genealogy from Brussels to Bandung, but notes that these have so far not touched upon territoriality. Finally, a third group of scholarship does in fact take up questions of territory and the ubiquity of the nation-state, but nevertheless does not compare this to the more fluid form of anti-imperialism that characterised the Brussels Congress. Despite an overall lack in IR when it comes to engaging with the Band-

ung Conference, recent works have done vital work in analysing the Conference and its implications for global ordering – in particular, edited volumes by Tan and Acharya (2008), Pham and Shilliam (2016), 2016 special issues of *Australian Journal of International Affairs* and *Inter-Asian Cultural Studies*, and edited volumes by Eslava et al (2017) and Lee (2019). The first of these was instrumental in agenda-setting by drawing attention to the lack of scholarship in this area. As the editors' note, The Asian-African Conference was appraised by many, then and since, as a watershed moment for international politics, though how and why is less certain (Acharya & Tan, 2008, p. 1).

The volume edited by Pham and Shilliam emphasises the 'excess of meaning' that was characteristic of Bandung. The book's title itself pays homage to the plurality of Bandung. The first half of the volume attests not just to the political significance of the Conference, but also to the affective, symbolic and even spiritual faces of Bandung. The second half of the volume aims to "resituate Bandung in both historical and contemporary contexts", outside of the narrow historiographical confines of the Cold War context (2016, p. 5).

A more diverse packaging of views is offered by the 2016 special issues of AJIA and Inter-Asian Cultural Studies. Nonetheless, Phillips offers a useful framework for thinking about the different aspects of Bandung's relationship to international order. The different contributions, he maintains, draw out the "order-affirming," "order-challenging", "order-building", and "order-trans-

forming" facets of Bandung (Phillips, 2016). Indeed, pointing to the order-affirming and order-building aspects of Bandung are particularly germane in pushing back against simplistic notions of the Conference as representing a "Revolt against the West" (Bull & Watson, 1984, Chapter 14).

Although Phillips' framing of the different facets of Bandung offers a useful hermeneutic for thinking through the ordering legacies of Bandung, most of these contributions attempt to trace legacies forward from Bandung. For example, Bandung is positioned as a forerunner to later post-colonial movements and developments. It is cited as an instance of proto-Third Worldism (Lee, 2019, p. 15; Prashad, 2007), a forerunner of the Non-Aligned Movement (Dinkel, 2018), a harbinger of the New International Economic Order or developmentalism (Amrith, 2005; Weber & Winanti, 2016), or as a basis for Asian regionalism (Acharya, 2016a) or the "Global South" (Grovogui, 2011). More diffusely, Pasha suggests that the "Bandung impulse" continues to serve as an "inescapable cipher" towards active and continual decolonization (Pasha, 2013, pp. 150–151). More critical accounts have focused on some of the less salutary aspects of the Bandung legacy, such as the authoritarianism of many Bandung regimes (Acharya, 2016b), or the tension between the decolonial thrust of Bandung and the suppression of West Papuan clamouring for self-determination (Hernawan, 2016). A more specific strand of scholarship has drawn a line from the LAI to Bandung. This article casts backward, to compare the moment of Bandung with

the earlier interwar anti-colonialism, out of which it grew. It is not alone in doing so – there is significant scholarship that seeks to situate Bandung as the culmination of decades of foregoing anti-colonial struggle. These works comprise the second group of literature, that put Brussels and Bandung in comparative perspective. Historians in particular have sought to situate Bandung in a longer tradition of anti-colonialism (Burton, 2020; Petersson, 2014, 2017; Prashad, 2007). Persaud, for instance, states that "Bandung…must be understood as the outcome and simultaneously a major moment in the cumulative history of struggles and resistances…" (Persaud, 2016, p. 136). He goes on to note that Nehru, Nasser and Zhou Enlai are commonly hailed as the luminaries of anti-colonial nationalism, but that such luminescence often obscures the earlier figures of this struggle. Persaud is surely right to note that the fingerprints of these earlier figures and movements were in evidence on the final communique of the Bandung Conference. And yet, the characterisation of this history as "cumulative" misses a useful point of contrast.

Indeed, as Burton notes, "Bandung exercises a powerful gravitational pull on histories of the League against Imperialism" (Burton, 2020, p. 397). As the opening speech from Sukarno illustrates, this was a connection that actors at the time made. It is also one that IR scholars have made since (Umar, 2019), along with historians (Petersson, 2014; Prashad, 2007). Yet, again, this scholarship has not sufficiently elucidated the change in territoriality in this comparative focus. Rath-

er than exploring the pre-history of Bandung to locate 'antecedents', I aim to construct a narrative of change, focused on the gradual embrace of territoriality in Africa and Asia between these two points.

There is a third and final group of scholarship that bears mentioning. These include works that recognise the territorial hardening represented by Bandung (Amin, 2017; Berger, 2004; Chatterjee, 2017; Hongoh, 2016). For Chatterjee, the "normalization of the nation-state", evident by the time of Bandung, was put in motion by the Mandate System of the League of Nations, both through its recognition of the potential sovereignty of mandate powers, and by recognition of certain governmental practices (2017, pp. 668–670). Berger offers an excellent critical overview of what he labels the "Bandung Regimes" that sprang forth from 1955, and how they charted and changed the politics of the "Third World." For Berger, the territoriality of Bandung baked in certain structural contradictions that doomed the project of the Third World. He says:

> the state-centred character of Third Worldism and its emphasis on an alliance of ostensibly sovereign territorial nation-states is a key element in the overall failure of Third Worldism generally and of the failure of a wide array of state-guided national development projects more specifically (2004, p. 31).

Amin also sees the state as central to the "Bandung Spirit." Of the major statesmen present at Bandung, he notes that "all of them considered that the state had to as-

sume a major responsibility in the control of the process [of development]" (2017, p. 610). Finally, Hongoh examines how pan-African solidarities and imaginaries were influential in birthing Bandung, but also overtaken and displaced by its more state-centric logic. He argues "Rather than presenting alternative possibilities for emancipation and transformation of the international order, Bandung defined emancipation within that order" (2016, p. 387).

These contributions add valuably to our understanding of how Bandung represented the triumph of territoriality. Yet the shortcomings of these accounts, however, is that they do not provide a window into the interwar form of anti-imperialism and how changing historical conditions allowed for the rise of a more territorial anti-imperialism to become ascendent and dominant.

In this respect, I draw close to Louro's work on Jawaharlal Nehru, a figure present at both the LAI and Bandung, when she observes that "the Bandung Conference marked the triumph of the nation-state and interstate relations in the arena of Afro-Asian politics, and it stood in contradistinction to the anti-imperialist internationalism of the interwar years. In Bandung, newly minted leaders of former colonies answered to nation-state imperatives and Cold War obligations rather than universal calls for anti-imperialism" (Louro, 2018, p. 258). This central insight also animates this piece. But the task that I turn to is to put this into IR parlance. In the next section, I outline how this shift from Brussels to Bandung represented a consolidation of the colonial world behind territori-

ality as a key feature of international order.

International Order and Territoriality

Tracing the changes in anti-imperialism from the LAI to Bandung reveals a transformation in international order. Territoriality, often assumed rather than explained in IR, was front and centre in this transformation. In this section, I show how an analysis of Bandung's territorial legacy enables us to approach claims of this as a "pluralist" moment more critically.

For some scholars, Bandung marked the creation of a pluralist international order due to its embrace of sovereignty and non-intervention. Yet, Bandung both consolidated and disseminated the institution of territorial sovereignty as *the* post-colonial pathway, marking a distinct narrowing from a more fluid form of anti-imperialism in the interwar years.

Contemporaneous Western commentary around Bandung was fearful. So too was a lot of Western scholarship produced in the aftermath of the Conference. English School scholars like Hedley Bull and Martin Wight fixated on the order-challenging aspects of Bandung. Somewhat later, James Mayall also wrote of Bandung as representing a "revisionist alliance" based on non-alignment, elimination of racism and colonialism, and in favour of modernisation and development (Mayall, 1990, pp. 126–127). As Devetak, Dunne and Nurhayati show, this characterisation of Bandung is overwrought (2016). Moreover, it overlooked the ways in which the principles of Bandung coalesced around certain older, long-standing principles of in-

ternational society. Thus, the contribution of Devetak *et al* unearths what we might call Bandung's "order-affirming" attributes, in Phillips' phrasing. The authors argue that the *Dasasila Bandung*, that is the principles articulated by the final communique of the Conference, are best seen as embodying the grand tradition of pluralism of international society.

Under pluralism, "the rules and institutions of international society are designed to facilitate cooperation among diverse – and seemingly incompatible – cultures, traditions and values. Pluralism protects plural conceptions of 'the good', in sharp contrast to colonial international society…" (2016, p. 359). The final communique of Bandung, the authors aver, was "entirely consistent" with a pluralist understanding of international society.

This emphasis on the 'order-affirming' aspects of Bandung is consistent with the argument of this article. However, focusing on territoriality allows us to reapproach the characterisation of this as a "pluralist" moment.

Within the English School, pluralism is typically used to describe international societies with a relatively low degree of shared rules, norms and institutions. Solidarism, contrarily, is used to describe international societies with a high degree of convergence of rules, norms and institutions (Bain, 2020). The classical formulation of this distinction is provided by Hedley Bull in "The Grotian Conception of International Society". Bull distinguished between pluralism, which locates the source of law in positive law and ex-

isting agreements among states, and solidarism, which identifies a greater unity binding states that is drawn from natural law. Bull's position in *The Anarchical Society* (1977) and elsewhere is generally thought to be sceptical of solidarism. Later writers have identified strongly with pluralism (Jackson, 2000), solidarism (Wheeler, 2000), or challenged or revisited the terms of debate (Buzan, 2004).

It is worth noting that recent scholarship has also challenged this view of Bandung as necessarily "pluralist." Quinton-Brown (2024) refers to the "Solidarist Internationalism" of Bandung (borrowing from Weber & Winanti, 2016). The "anti-colonial redescription" of the intervention problem, in his telling, actually fused a concern with human rights and non-intervention – traditionally thought to be antithetical in much English School writing. I concur that the "pluralist" characterisation of Bandung has problems. However, my issue comes not with the substance of the norms of international society – such as those concerning intervention or human rights – but with the more fundamental prescriptions of international order; namely, its units.

The chief problem with characterising Bandung as representing a "pluralist" view of international society is that it conceals what was a world-historical convergence in the institutional form of the nation-state.

International orders entail very fundamental prescriptions about political subjectivity. Orders rest on bedrock agreements on the acceptable locus of political authority. All forms of order legitimate certain units of political agency (and by extension dele-

gitimise or exclude others). Much literature on order in fact overlooks this bedrock purpose. Hedley Bull's classic and oft-cited definition of order, for instance, simply assumes the sovereign state as the building block of order. But this is historically and conceptually short-sighted. Only since the waves of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s has there been a sovereign state monoculture. Of relevance here is what Reus-Smit labels the "recognition function" of international orders (Reus-Smit, 2017). These he calls 'primary institutions', not to be confused with much more surface-level issue-specific regimes that govern international life. Such institutions establish the basic units of political authority. One implication of this insight, he notes, is that there "has never been a truly pluralist international order" and different orders have varied ways of distributing "political authority" (2017, p. 877). . All forms of order entail the elevation of some forms of cultural identity and difference over others, and of certain institutional forms over would-be competitors. This allows us to approach the arguments of Devetak *et al* over Bandung afresh. By missing this basic 'recognition function' of international orders they are blinded to the way that the 'expansion' or 'globalisation' of international society depended on the creation of a more solidarist, in the sense of institutionally convergent, set of norms about the territorial nation-state being the acceptable locus for political agency.

An eloquent rendition of this argument is provided in Rao's reading of the entry of post-colonial states into international society. He narrates this as a moment of

striking convergence; a *solidarist* moment, stating:

> The creation of international society entailed an extraordinary convergence of norms, in which multiple forms of political subjectivity were supplanted by one kind of political subject – the territorial state – and in which a plurality of forms of ordering inter-communal relations were swept aside by a particular set of 'pluralist' rules of Westphalian pedigree. In this sense, the creation of a universal international society must be seen as a *solidarist* moment (Rao, 2010, p. 72, emphasis in original).

This is easily missed because territoriality itself is an often-overlooked feature of the international system. The extension of the state in physical space has tended to be taken for granted rather than analysed in IR (Larkins, 2010). This is what Larkins labels as the "territorial *a* priori" of the discipline. In a recent piece tracing some of the difficulties of the Liberal International Order, the authors stress the centrality of territoriality for contemporary order. "Territorial authority uses borders to help create and reinforce groups, identities and privileges. It provides the foundation for modern state sovereignty. In this sense, international borders are encoded into the DNA of the modern state system" (Simmons & Goemans, 2021). Yet, this coupling of territory, authority and identity was a contingent, historical process. How did it take place and how did it become the universal model? We can find some clues in older disciplinary works. In his landmark

1993 article, Ruggie criticised IR as lacking the conceptual toolkit to meaningfully examine order transformation (1993). This was followed by an account of how we arrived at a world of territorially demarcated, mutually exclusive sovereign states. Material conditions alone were insufficient to provide an explanation. Instead, Ruggie contends, we must examine the social *episteme*, or mental equipment, that people drew upon when imagining forms of political community (Ruggie, 1993). "The distinctive feature of the modern system of rule is that it has differentiated its subject collectively into territorially defined, fixed, and mutually exclusive enclaves of legitimate dominion. As such, it is unique in human history" (Ruggie 1993, 151). Here, Ruggie offers up both a definition of territoriality along with a broad meta-narrative about how the medieval system of non-exclusive rule transformed into one of territorially exclusive polities. Ruggie's piece is immensely helpful in getting us towards the more bedrock function of international orders previously mentioned.

But Ruggie's historical account does not trace how territoriality unfolded in Africa and Asia, and how it was extended into the (post)colonial world. That is the narrative the next section picks up.

From the LAI to Bandung: The Road to Territoriality

This section deals with a more specific part of the story Ruggie first took up in 1993 – namely, how territorial sovereignty became embraced by the post-colonial world in Africa, Asia and the Pacific during

the latter half of the twentieth century and, in doing so, displaced other pan-nationalist and federal visions with a more ambiguous relationship to territorial rule. The non-territorial form of anti-imperialism that animated the LAI was ultimately the product of the nascence of anti-colonial nationalism among many of the colonised, and the dominance of a primarily communist vision of anti-imperialism, which aimed to stitch the proletariat of the industrialised countries together with the colonised to create a globally united anti-imperialist movement. In the narrative that follows, I trace how this version of anti-imperialism yielded to one that was centred on the nation-state. I highlight the collapse of the Soviet "united front" policy, the emergence of global fascism, the polarisation between left and right, and then trace the declining centrality of pan-Asianism and pan-Islamism. These latter movements were greatly weakened by the rise of Japanese imperialism and the disassembly of the Ottoman Caliphate, respectively. In setting the chronological scope, the LAI and Bandung are to be taken as illuminating points of reference in the overall process of territorialisation – not necessarily as start or end points.

Contemporaries were not aware they were living in the 'interwar' period. Only with hindsight could this label be applied. And yet the 'in-betweenness' summoned by this label was acutely felt by many actors, who sensed that they were living in a transitional period. "We appear to be in a dissolving period of history, when the world is in labour and out of her travail will give birth to a new order..." Nehru observed (1936, p. 15).

Further, this sense of 'in-betweenness' likewise captures the international spaces and fora that were vitally maintained during this period, outside the siloes of nation-states and colonial regimes. This was a time of intense networking, conferencing, mobilisation and correspondence that joined anti-imperial actors from all around the world. For a time, this international space of sedition seemed to transcend the territorial logic of the inter-state system (Louro, 2018, p. 259).

One crucial site for this anti-colonial internationalism was the Brussels Conference. On February 10, 1927, the First International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism and for National Independence was held. 134 Delegates from 34 different countries attended. The conference was effectively the brainchild of German Communist Willi Munzenberg. Officially, it was organised under the auspices of the Communist International (Comintern), but oversight (and funding) was lacking. Only a minority were doctrinaire communists (Manela, 2020, p. 11). As Petersson has noted, the League's Berlin headquarters functioned as a crucial 'hub' for anti-imperialism at this time (2014). It was truly instrumental in crafting international solidarities since it provided an invaluable forum for its members to relay their colonial oppression while learning of others'. This way, the attendees drew connections between their experiences and learned of their joined struggle. "The League was unique in that its entire existence was devoted to exposing imperialism as a systemic, global problem that needed to be eradicated everywhere through the activism of both colonized and

non-colonized peoples," as Louro *et al* put it. (2020, p. 21). Quite unlike the later Bandung, the Brussels Conference produced a standing organisation. The League against Imperialism was founded at the end of the Brussels Conference and by the end of that year, branches had opened in Argentina, Brazil, China, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Palestine, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, San Salvador, South Africa, the United States and Uruguay. The League's name was intended as a pointed rebuke of the League of Nations, which despite US President Woodrow Wilson's talk of "national self-determination", had preserved the institution of empire (Louro, 2018, Chapter 1; Prashad, 2007, p. 21).

Both the participants and principles of the LAI serve to illustrate the more diffuse and non-territorial character of anti-colonial nationalism at this point. The 174 delegates came from all over the world. Crucially, the League not only sought to contest the civilizational superiority of European empires, but also sought to diagnostically link empire and capitalism. The former was in fact an outgrowth of the latter. This expansive understanding of imperialism implied unsuspected commonalities and demanded broad solidarities. According to Jani, the Brussels Conference's broad base showed that "Empire's sites included European possessions in Asia and Africa, mandate territories in the Middle East, the international black population de-territorialized by slavery, Latin American victims of American "semi-colonialism", and European workers exploited

by the elite in their own nations" (Louro et al., 2020, p. 237). This meant that the delegates at Brussels from the colonised world were encouraged to imagine their struggle as conjoined with the proletariat of the West. Notionally independent, the Latin American delegates nevertheless explained how they continued to be subject to American intervention and deprived of true freedom. These constituencies – Western socialists and communists, and Latin American victims of "neo-colonialism" – were ones that would ultimately fall out of the Bandung coalition.

The milieu in which the LAI operated was what Raza et al label "the internationalist moment" of the interwar years (Raza et al., 2015). The discrediting of empire after WWI, and the failure of Wilsonian internationalism to heed the ambitions of the non-European world, set in motion a chaotic but energetic search for alternative visions of world order. Crucially, the retreat from Wilsonian internationalism (Manela, 2007) did not mark a retreat from internationalism more broadly within Asia. Rather, the interwar period witnessed a frenzied search for "new solutions and blueprints for a world of greater stability, equality, and interdependency..." (Raza et al., 2015, p. vii) uniting seemingly disparate movements such as pacifism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Asianism, Aryanism, religious mobilization, various forms of anti-imperialism, trade unionism, socialism, communism, and national sovereignty (Raza et al., 2015, p. vii).

The dizzying array of such movements potentially complicates a simple transition story from empire to nation. Several

authors have cautioned against a teleological reading of this period along these lines. Frederick Cooper warns that this "metanarrative risks masking these diverse forms of political imagination into a single teleology" (Cooper, 2002, p. 67). Meanwhile, Manu Goswami laments the eclipse of interwar internationalisms relative to the study of nationalism, and the presumption that the former were merely ""futile holding operations" against the inevitable consolidation of the nation-form" (Goswami, 2012, p. 1462).

Gorman argues that "Interwar experiments in international governance were premised on a de-territorialization of world politics. If the First World War had been caused by traditional geopolitical conflicts, the path to international peace lay in separating politics from spatial ordering" (Gorman, 2012, p. 9). Yet, a series of accelerating pressures toward territorialisation began to exert themselves in the colonial world beginning in the late 1920s. Political independence demanded the specification of viable territorial units. The nation-state ultimately supplied answers to this problematic where federal and pan-visions could not. A constellation of developments hastened this transition.

In the 1930s, global politics increasingly polarized across Left/Right lines, particularly as right-wing nationalisms gathered strength. The related stories of the decline of the League-led interwar order and the rise of fascism are well-known; canonically narrated in E.H Carr's *The Twenty Years Crisis* (Carr, 1946). Less well-known is that a genuinely global 'fascist imaginary' grew up in the interwar years.[1] Mussolini and Hitler found cautious admirers in Indian thinkers such as Taraknath Das (Framke, 2016), Subhas Chandra Bose, and Benoy Kumar Sarkar. Rejecting racial and imperial precepts, Indian thinkers nevertheless found much to admire in the emphasis on national revival led by strong leader and a strong state.

> In the light of fascist successes in Europe, and fascism's apparent ability to form disciplined national units and demonstrate a strong collective will behind a strong leader, not a few people began to think in terms of similar leadership that could take India to independence and strong nationhood (Zachariah, 2004, p. 89).

The engagement with fascism arguably left an enduring imprint on the Hindutva movement. Raza and Roy document the rapid rise of paramilitary organisations in India in the 1930s (2015). The far-right *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) organisation modelled itself on the Brown Shirts, for instance. Most distressingly for Indian Muslims, Hindu nationalists such as Golkwalkar and Savarkar looked eagerly on the fascist 'purging' of ethnic minorities – amplifying Muslim insecurities and belief that a separate state was existentially necessary (Bhagavan, 2013, p. 89). Aga Khan feared Muslims would "descend to the position of the Jews in Germany at present" (cited in Bayly, 2012, p. 324). The rise of Fascism and dissemination of 'a fascist repertoire' (Zachariah, 2015, p. 642)

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[1] Recent work is altering this. An excellent account of the influence of fascist ideas in India is Benjamin Zachariah, (Zachariah, 2015)

militarized nationalism and placed a premium on claims of territorial defence (and acquisition!). This exerted a rightward pull across the board, as anti-Fascists embarked on their own counter-militarization. By the 1930s, even Gandhi had converted to belief in strong national defence, now deeming it necessary for *swaraj* ("self-rule", in English), stating "I think that a nation that has no control over her own defence forces and over her external policy is hardly a responsible nation" (Cited in Parel, 2016, p. 109). Geopolitical exigencies thus changed the character of interwar nationalism. The emergence of fascism intensified the quest for statehood and militarization of nationalism – not merely through its adherents, but also in the reaction it inspired in its opponents.

Socialist and Communist internationalisms were also very influential in the colonies – including India, where M.N Roy established a Communist Party in 1920. The late 20s were a time of industrial militancy, trade unionism, and strikes (Zachariah, 2004, p. 56). The 'standard of civilization' suggested that capitalist Europe was the model of emulation, but anti-colonial thinkers were attracted to the counter-hegemonic allure of the Soviet model. The Wall Street crash of 1929 and ensuing Great Depression intensified disillusionment with capitalism, and deepened the Soviet Union's appeal – particularly as it seemed miraculously unscathed by the Depression (Zachariah, 2004, p. 81). Having earlier submitted a petitioned titled 'the claims of the people of Annam' to Wilson, and, receiving no reply, Ho Chi Minh converted to Marxism-Leninism; a trajecto-

ry representative of many anti-colonial activists. The 'united front' policy of Lenin was crucial from 1920-28 in allowing a broad anti-colonial coalition to emerge (Louro, 2018, p. 22). Embracing the rhetoric of 'self-determination,' Lenin promoted anti-imperial revolution first and class struggle later. This enabled an alliance between anti-colonial nationalism and international socialism to take root. The Bolsheviks eagerly sought to coordinate international anti-colonialism through meetings such as the 1920 Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku.

Yet, the broad-based coalitions and emphasis on the rootless 'workers of the world' did not last. Chiang Kai-Shek was the first to defect from the United Front when he broke the alliance with the CCP, marched into Shanghai in April 1927 and massacred thousands of suspected communists and trade unionists (Louro et al., 2020, p. 12). Comintern internationalism was progressively reoriented to the geopolitical imperatives of Moscow, especially under Stalin and the turn to 'revolution in one country'. The League against Imperialism, established in 1927 as a pointed counter to the League of Nations, provides an apt example of this transition. A Louro documents, non-communists like Nehru were initially equal partners in the diverse body, before creeping Communist influence imposed ideological uniformity (Louro, 2018, Chapters 1 & 2). Nehru himself was 'excommunicated' in 1931. At the Brussels Congress that preceded the formation of the League, a resolution drafted by Nehru that spoke of "joint struggle" was later amended by the Communist-dominated secretariat to

read "Soviet struggle" (Louro, 2018, p. 47). By 1939, the non-aggression pact between Hitler and Stalin fundamentally ruptured any remaining possibility for communist and non-communist solidarity in the anti-imperialist cause and seemed to mark the eclipse of international anti-imperialism for geopolitics.

Already, by the late 1920s, the discourses of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism had begun to lose ground to nationalism. Pan-Islamism was dealt a serious blow when the Ottoman Empire was not only ignobly defeated and dismembered, but Kemal Ataturk embraced secular nationalism, abandoning the Caliphate and with it all sovereign claims over distant Muslims lands; once the prerogative of the Caliph. Turkey's successful renegotiation of its boundaries and achievement of integration into international society held out a model for fellow Muslim countries (Aydin, 2007, pp. 149–150). Arab nationalists exulted in Ataturk's achievement, which was a point of pride for Muslims across the world. But the model was territorial sovereignty. Replacement of Empire with Nation in Turkey precipitated the breakout of massive ethnic violence and population transfers. This episode would have an unhappy sequel in the partition of the subcontinent. Pan-Islamism, beyond this point, was diluted to mean the anticolonial activism within Muslim nations, and convey a loose sense of solidarity – there was no longer an imagined integrated Muslim polity at the centre of this vision (Aydin, 2007, p. 150). When asked in 1947 of the possibility of Pakistan forming part of a federation of Islamic states, Jinnah

pronounced "the [political] theory of pan-Islamism has long ago exploded" (Jinnah, 2007, p. 36).

Pan-Asianism, meanwhile, was greatly weakened by its association with Japanese imperialism. Due to its technical and industrial achievements, Japan's model of 'Asian modernity' was initially a cause of pride for nationalists across Asia. "The Russo-Japanese War thrilled India to its core. The recognition of Japan as a great power by the Concert of Europe is regarded by Young India as the potent factor in Indian nationalism," wrote Lala Lajpat Rai (1968, p. 222). But Japan's elevation was not just to the rank of the great powers, but the imperial powers. In 1915, it issued the '21 demands' to China, imposing the same unequal treaty that had been characteristic of European relations towards Japan in an earlier era. Some tried to enunciate a vision of pan-Asianism that reminded Japan of its spiritual affinity with its Asian victims. In 1924, Sun Yat-Sen urged Japan to return to the values of Asianism, which he identified as a moral Confucian politics, and to abandon the Machiavellianism of the West (Aydin, 2007, p. 152). As Aydin notes, this speech indicated the continued salience of a civilizational discourse of pan-Asianism at this time. By the 1930s, however, the discrediting of a Japanese-led pan-Asianism was completed with the invasion of Manchuria. This invasion "worked a change in Indian nationalists' dreams of an Asian unity to be organised under Japan's leadership against the pretensions of the Western peoples" (Prasad, 1952, pp. 150–151). When a resolution calling for the construction of 'a

pan-Asiatic Federation' was put forward at the annual Congress meeting in 1929, even the Asianist Nehru couldn't help but scoff that "nobody quite [understands] what this means, including the mover of the resolution" (Louro, 2018, p. 137).

Ideas of pan-nationalism continued to discursively permeate nationalism and allow it to link up with a broader imaginary but ceased to contain any political or territorial referent. As Aydin puts it: "Yet there were no practical projects to create an alliance or solidarity among Asian nations, and overall the political destiny of pan-Islamic and pan-Asian movements did not match the intellectual vibrancy of their critiques of world order" (Aydin, 2007, p. 149). There were conceptual reasons underlying territorialisation too. For, as Goebel shows, the cultural imaginaries summoned earlier could not indefinitely defer the issue of juridical boundaries implied by nationalism.

> However cosmopolitan or transnational the networks and the intellectual practices undergirding the pan-movements, they all imagined somehow bounded communities. Their outer boundaries admittedly were often blurred, marked by different and overlapping criteria ranging from language and religion to race, ethnicity, or a vaguely defined "civilization" with its distinctive "soul" or "spirit." However, inasmuch as these cultural imaginaries merged with the discourse of rights…they eventually became enmeshed with questions of the polity, of sovereignty, and of territoriality. In discussing their peoples' civilization, rights advocates culturalized their political demands and conversely politicized their imagined ethno-cultural units. Simply put, they could barely avoid questions about the political entities representing the civilizational spheres that pan-visions had conceived (Goebel, 2015, p. 269).

In the end, it was the administrative boundaries of Empire that would strongly determine the shape of the territorial units that emerged in empire's wake.

Bandung

On April 18-24, 1955, delegates from 29 African and Asian nations met in Bandung, Indonesia. 5 independent countries sponsored the event – India, Indonesia, Ceylon, Egypt and Burma. The leaders of India and Indonesia, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President Sukarno, played an outsized role in putting the event together. Somewhat controversially, China was represented by Mao's right-hand man and foreign minister, Zhou Enlai, who had survived an assassination attempt on the way to the Conference. Despite American fearmongering about Chinese Communism and radicalism, Zhou put in a very adept diplomatic performance and won over many of the other attendees. In addition to communist China, there were American-aligned states in attendance too, like Pakistan and the Philippines. Nevertheless, despite a difficult start and diverse ideological orientations, the Conference-goers produced a joint document with

great importance for international order. These were the *Dasasila Bandung* – the 10 principles of Bandung (a reference to Indonesia's five foundational principles – *Pancasila*).

Ultimately, Bandung exemplified the triumph of territoriality by way of its membership and its principles. Addressing the first, it is noteworthy that the participants were the heads or representatives of newly formed governments. Bandung differed from an earlier meeting in 1947 – the Asian Relations Conference – in hosting only independent nations.[2] Louro brings this into focus through the person of Nehru. She claims "…Bandung reinforced the primacy of the nation-state as the key geopolitical unit and reified the interstate system as the defining feature of politics in Asia and Africa" (Louro, 2018, p. 274). Whereas the LAI had been a meeting of anti-colonial minds, Bandung was a meeting of independent states.

The principles expounded by the Conference also showcase the transition to territoriality. The final communique listed "respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations" as the second principle, clearly foregrounding the primacy of the territorial state. Indeed, only principles 9 and 10 advocated solidarity and cooperation. Overall, the communique made oft-mention of principles already enshrined in the United Nations (UN) – human rights, non-intervention, the preservation of peace – even though 9 of the attendee countries were not yet members of the UN. Perhaps this was one reason why the Americans and British observers

begrudgingly withdrew their concern of the feared radicalism of the Conference. US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles noted that this was a document that the Americans themselves could have signed onto; while the British noted that the outcome was "gratifyingly moderate" (Cheng Guan, 2008, p. 36). As James Mayall noted, "Independence was the essence of the nationalist position, so not surprisingly there was no talk at Bandung of either integration or supranational authority" (Mayall, 1990, p. 126). In its participants and principles, therefore, Bandung marked a consolidation of territoriality.

Bandung was not a retreat from internationalism, by any means. It was the staging ground for both the NAM and for Third Worldism – projects that envisioned collective action at the heart of creating a more just and equal world order. As Lee notes

> It represented a coalition of new nations that possessed the autonomy to enact a novel world order committed to human rights, self-determination, and world peace. It set the stage for a new historical agency, to envision and make the world anew (Lee, 2019, p. 15).

This powerfully captures the Bandung Spirit; a sense of the "worldmaking" possibilities for this new coalition. And yet, lingering on the word 'agency' is revealing. For while Bandung marked a discovery – or rediscovery – of historical agency for colonised peoples, it did so also with a certain 'agent' at the heart of this project. The anti-imperialism of 1955 was no longer than of 1927: a

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[2] The only exception being Cyprus.

more fluid and broad-based global anti-imperial movement had evolved into one located in Afro-Asia that identified the territorial nation-state as its necessary vehicle.

Conclusion

This article has proposed that one of the underappreciated legacies of the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung was the entrenchment of the territorial nation-state as the vehicle for decolonization and therefore, more broadly as the legitimate unit of international order. Global and international histories have more recently orchestrated a pushback against the tendency to romanticise Bandung (Burton, 2019). It was an era of contradictions and tensions, as many have noted. Moreover, its loftier goals were soon vitiated by the *realpolitik* of the Cold War. However, I have suggested within that a certain *realpolitik* had already exercised a decisive pull on the trajectory of decolonization – one preceding and yet exemplified in and pushed by Bandung. At the time that the League Against Imperialism was formed in 1927, anti-colonial internationalism was eclectic, diffuse, fluid and unsettled. Many of the diverse strands of anti-colonialism at this time had no clear or necessary territorial referent as the vehicle for the end of empire. However, tracing the geopolitical developments of the latter interwar years, this article has brought into view how this internationalism came to settle on the territorial nation-state as the sole means by which decolonisation should occur. Construing Bandung's prehistory this way, we can appreciate the way in which the "first intercontinental conference of coloured peoples in the history of mankind", according to Sukarno (1955), was not in fact a triumph for a pluralist international society *per se*, but a consolidation around a new bedrock principle of territoriality. The international order of territorial nation states that we are living in – the world partly bequeathed to us by Bandung – was one that had to be created, often chaotically, sometimes violently, by bordering the post-colonial world.

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The Lost Soul of Bandung in Indonesia's Foreign Policy

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This article explores Indonesia's evolving role in global diplomacy, focusing on its historical leadership in the Bandung Conference and the subsequent challenges it has faced in maintaining that influence. The study examines two central questions: why the appeal of the Bandung Conference had not elevated Indonesia into prominence, and what challenges and opportunities ahead that should be considered to resolve the issue. Through a qualitative approach, the research analyses the transformation of Indonesian foreign policy, examining the shift from Sukarno's commitment to Bandung's principles to the pragmatic diplomacy of Suharto and beyond. The study draws on the concept of normative power to explain how Indonesia's diplomatic aspirations have often lacked clarity and coherence. The findings highlight the continued relevance of Bandung's vision in challenging neo-colonial structures, but also underscore the obstacles Indonesia faces, including domestic political instability and inconsistent foreign policy. While cautiously optimistic about Indonesia's potential to revitalize Bandung's legacy, the article concludes that achieving this requires clear leadership and alignment with contemporary global issues. Ultimately, this paper contributes to understanding the complexities of postcolonial diplomacy and the future of middle power states, with practical implications for Indonesia's role in a multipolar world.

Keywords: *Indonesia, Bandung Conference, middle power, normative power, foreign policy*

Introduction

The global order has undergone a thorough transformation since the mid-20th century. The Cold War era was marked by a rigid bipolar order, dominated by two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. Nations across the world were often compelled to take sides with one of these blocs, with little room for other voices to be heard. Following the end of the Cold War, this dichotomous framework was replaced by a more fluid and nuanced multipolar world, where power was diffused and scat-tered among a variety of state and non-state actors.

However, behind this apparent diversity, a longstanding imbalance persists—most notably illustrated by the Brandt Line—which continues to underscore the divide between the Global North and South in terms of economic development, political representation, and participation in global decision-making forums (Lees, 2021). In response to this inequity, a number of countries—particularly from the Global South—have begun to pursue alternative approaches

to global governance and diplomacy, seeking to influence the international order from the margins. These states, increasingly recognized for their bridging roles between core and periphery, are often referred as middle powers.

According to Robertson (2017), Jordaan (2017), and Teo (in Ardhani et. al. 2023), the definitive understanding of middle power is debatable between whether the country possesses medium material capability or country which demonstrates specific diplomatic behaviours such as multilateralism of soft power. In general, middle power is those states with middling material capability which practice persuasive diplomatic strategies in their foreign affairs (Ardhani, et.al., 2023). These countries, rather than employing coercive power, leave their imprint through activist diplomacy, multilateral involvement, and normative leadership. Rather than hegemonic aspirations, middle powers tend to be the stabilizers during times of global uncertainty, particularly in multilateral forums such as the United Nations, the G20, or in other regional organizations.

This bridging function becomes especially relevant in a multipolar world, where no single actor holds uncontested authority. In such a landscape, middle powers have the opportunity to carve out diplomatic space for themselves, particularly by amplifying the interests of the Global South and advocating for a more equitable international order. Their relatively flexible positioning allows them to engage with both developed and developing states, offering platforms for dialogue and cooperation. As the global system continues to grapple with enduring inequalities and fragmented alliances, middle powers can play a critical role in filling leadership gaps left by major powers focused on strategic rivalry. In this context, middle powers are not only diplomatic actors but also normative carriers—capable of reintroducing principles of justice, equality, and solidarity into a global order.

According to Ardhani et al. (2023) and Teo (2021), Indonesia qualifies as a middle power by occupying a position beneath great powers in material capabilities, employing middle power diplomatic strategies, and explicitly identifying itself as such. This classification aligns with Indonesia's long-standing commitment to international cooperation and its advocacy for the interests of developing nations. Such commitment was evident in the 1955 Bandung Conference, where Indonesia brought together leaders from 29 Asian and African countries to promote Afro-Asian solidarity, resist colonialism and neocolonialism, and challenge Cold War hegemonies (Chakrabarty, 2005). The conference fostered unity among newly decolonized states and significantly contributed to global anti-imperialist movements. For Indonesia, Bandung was not merely a diplomatic success but the crystallization of its identity as a moral leader of the Global South (Acharya, 2016; Vickers, 2013). In the current multipolar world, Indonesia has the opportunity to operationalize the Bandung Spirit to reinforce its middle power status by upholding multilateralism and non-alignment while balancing strategic relations with major powers such as China and the Unit-

ed States and advancing the interests of the Global South.

This paper builds upon and extends the work of Nabbs-Keller (2020), which examines Indonesia's leadership role in the contested Indo-Pacific order, by offering a broader analysis of Indonesia's legitimacy and its efforts to establish itself as a global middle power. While Nabbs-Keller's study focused on Indonesia's position as ASEAN's '*primus inter pares actor*' and its diplomatic leadership within the Indo-Pacific, this paper shifts the focus to Indonesia's diplomatic significance within the Global South. Specifically, it explores how Indonesia navigates its role and asserts its influence in global middle power governance, emphasizing its broader international engagement beyond the Indo-Pacific region.

Contrary to other studies, this paper argues that Indonesia's current foreign policy increasingly departs from the foundational principles articulated at the Bandung Conference. While Bandung 1955 emphasized non-alignment and anti-colonial internationalism, contemporary foreign policy approaches reveal a growing tendency to align, either explicitly or implicitly, with major powers. More importantly, Indonesia's strategic direction appears increasingly inconclusive and lacks a clear ideological foundation. This shift not only diminishes the normative legacy of Bandung but also weakens Indonesia's opportunity to position itself as a prominent middle power in today's global order. This analysis highlights the disparity between Indonesia's diplomatic actions and the Bandung Spirit, advocating for a realign-

ment of foreign policy to its original tenets.

Methodology

This article is qualitative in character, attempting to collect available written and oral documents such as speeches and commentaries from the Conference and its commemorations, which are complemented by a vast source of scholarly articles that are relevant to picture the inability of Indonesia to assert its normative power from its once-prominent role in the Bandung Conference. The focus is to show how political transformation in and around Indonesia has significantly altered its conception of Bandung Conference itself, which in turn fostered the perception of obsolescence should Indonesia wills to propagate Bandung Conference in present times. In describing transformation, this article intends to pinpoint the development of Indonesian foreign policy, especially with regards to how the ideals of Bandung Conference came about under Sukarno's presidency, and the subsequent events that shifted Indonesia's worldview that played a pivotal role in the future.

This article understands normative power in accordance with Ardhani et al. (2023) that stipulates persuasive capabilities, particularly regarding middle-power states, to influence other states in the international system. The applicability of norms is certainly complicated, requiring masterful assessment in its design to effectively project and translate it to practical consequences (Goddard & Krebs, 2015). It is a useful tool, especially for states that do not possess as much economic and military power, be-

cause their preferences could be shared by other parties–sometimes under the narrative of a "greater good" (Ardhani et al. 2023). In line with those considerations, this article is concerned with Indonesia's failure to engage the international community despite Indonesia's significant role in the conception of the Bandung Conference, which is continuously echoed and celebrated in the international forums. It demonstrates how Indonesia's attempts of leading the middle-power states lack clarity and fruitful strategy.

The Rise and Fall of Bandung in the 20th Century Indonesia

Having held the conference itself, Indonesia was certainly respected amongst the collective. Those within the nationalists' spectrum, including Sukarno and Hatta, were prominent figures in advocating the common struggle in international forums, such as League Against Imperialism (Prashad, 2007). Similar affinity for international engagement can also be attributed to other political spectrums like the Communists and Islamists, who were involved in a vast network of alliances against colonial and imperial regimes (Hasyim, 2020; Louro et al., 2020). Semaun, an established member of *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party) (PKI), was also present in the League Against Imperialism congress in Brussels (1929). The dimension of plurality and commonality, a spirit that would then be instrumental in the encapsulation of Bandung Conference as the soul for anticolonial struggle, is embodied well in Indonesia.

Sure enough, it does not mean the division between different ideologies are absent within the nation. Far from it, constant–and sometimes bloody–back and forth occurred. However, as noted by Aspinall & Berger (2001), the conflicts between 1945–1965 were "mostly about the composition of the national government or the philosophical foundations of the nation-state, not about its national borders." The 1948 Madiun Conflict, perhaps a notable example of the bloody side of the conflict, was due to the dissatisfaction from PKI supporters–many belonged to the decommissioned troops–towards Hatta's policy to restructure the military (ReRa) (Bourchier, 2015). Meanwhile, the establishment of liberal democracy in 1949 sprouted a battleground in the *Konstituante* (Constitutional Assembly). Political parties were in a continuous deadlock, as everyone was unable to convince others to submit towards their vision of the new constitution (Bourchier, 2015).

In navigating the difficult tide of international politics, the formulation of *politik bebas-aktif* (Independent and Active Policy) encapsulated Indonesia's position in foreign policy of that particular time. It dealt with the brewing domestic elites' rivalry, as well as the interweaving webs of Western v Communist bloc (Sukma, 1995). Hatta, its primary interlocutor, acknowledged the necessity to engage in international cooperation to realize the advancement of the nation and the world, while remaining cautious from aligning and creating problems against the two blocs (Hatta, 1953). Later, in his paper after the Bandung Conference, he echoed the spir-

it of Bandung towards Asia-African states "as 'a moral union' which can influence, in the interest of peace, those states which are banded into blocs" (Hatta, 1958). It was deemed important to achieve the goals of safeguarding economic and political matters (Sukma, 1995). Throughout the era of liberal democracy, the value had been consistently adhered, rendering a pragmatist, but principled position to the outside world (Sukma, 1995).

This interpretation changed after Sukarno decided to disband the parliament and established *demokrasi terpimpin* (Guided Democracy) in 1959. Already a prominent face to the international anticolonial movement, Sukarno had radicalized the *bebas-aktif* towards a terrain of confrontation. Bandung was used in pointing out differences between the "old powers" and "new emerging powers," emanated in the foundations of NAM in 1961 (McGregor & Hearman, 2017). Indonesia had declared itself out from the United Nations. The "rejuvenated" anticolonial solidarity became more explicit, as states from Latin America, Caribbean, and Europe hopped in. There was no more holding back in conjuring a third bloc. In the fifth anniversary of the Bandung Conference, deliberations about "going beyond formal independence" were rapid, a further leap from the previously agreed upon point from Bandung (McGregor & Hearman, 2017). Indonesia, which was at the time embroiled in a controversial *Konfrontasi* (confrontation) towards Malaysia–a "puppet" of British imperium–was adamant to rally the support of its action, signalled by the manoeuvres to ally with

communist states, creating a Jakarta-Phnom Penh-Hanoi-Peking-Pyongyang axis (Weinstein, 2007; Zhou, 2015). Nevertheless, it must be noted that NAM states were mixed in response to Sukarno's call for "militant solidarity," with Yugoslavia's Joseph Broz Tito holding the 1965 NAM Ambassadorial Meetings in Belgrade that resulted in "Seventeen Nations Appeal" to urge restraint for the conflicting nations (Rakove, 2015).

The confrontative narrative did not last longer as General Suharto took over the executive role amid the political tumult of 1965. Indonesia experienced a phase of total restart; an erasure of the communists through nationwide condemnation and killings of suspected communists (Roosa, 2006), as well as the establishment of New Order–a military-controlled order. The implication looms larger than that, however, as it marks the complete departure from ideologically driven politics. Pancasila was determined to be the *only* ideology, which laid out a red carpet for legitimizing political subordination. In the context of foreign policy, the New Order reversed the switch, instead projecting Indonesia as a "good neighbour" that seeks to make friends with neighbouring states (Weinstein, 2007). Indonesia geared much of its attention towards securing financial aid from Western bloc and maintaining its domestic and regional political stability–as visible in the founding of ASEAN. Despite Indonesia still making some international initiatives, especially in the context of NAM during the New Order, the initiatives rarely panned out more than symbolic significance, highlighting the stark contrast to the previous

governments (Weinstein, 2007). The "de-Su-karno-ization", a term coined to fracture the influence of Sukarno in Indonesian society, was also apparent in foreign policy.

In understanding Indonesia's retreat from the international stage, the transition to the New Order is an important turn of events since it was within this stage that Indonesia forgo its fervour in promoting non-cooperation with major powers. The changing character of Indonesia's foreign policy is also reflected in its reluctance to engage with NAM–and G77–in the issue of New International Economic Order, in which Indonesia tended to be pragmatic about the prospect of such conjecture (Arndt, 1981; Weinstein, 2007). Indonesia had instead optioned to receive consultation and aid through its links with the Intergovernmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI) that consisted of Western-allied states. While there had been several states already signed up for either Western or Soviet's aid even in 1955 (Prashad, 2007), Indonesia's case is particularly striking since the shift would preface the twilight of the Third World Movement. The movement lost fire in the 1970s–1980s due to its members experiencing a variety of political and economic backlashes, which in interim provided an ample rationale for forging an alliance with the existing blocs, rather than persisting with the nonpartisan stance (Prashad, 2007). Thus, by the time Indonesia rekindles its former glory of Bandung, the essence has gone past them.

Bandung Spirit amidst The Complex Contemporary International Order

In retrospect, the Bandung Conference is a powerful legacy for the Global South and Indonesia. *Dasasila Bandung* is known as the embodiment of Indonesia's early post-colonial aspirations: sovereignty, peaceful coexistence, non-aggression towards one another, and solidarity among nations rising from the shadow of expanding imperialism (Suryadinata, 2022). These values were in line with Mohammad Hatta's "free and independent" (*bebas aktif*) foreign policy doctrine, which was free from great power politics but affirmative in its attitude towards international relations (Hatta, 1953). In the early Cold War period of bipolarity, this policy provided Indonesia with a moral and strategic stance that was anti-colonial and assertive diplomatically. The Bandung Conference was therefore not symbolic but one of the first articulations of a foreign policy identity which struggled to contain geopolitical tensions and diplomacy in the service of Global South rights.

However, the extent to which *Dasasila Bandung* continues to influence Indonesia's foreign policy remains a subject of ongoing critical debate, particularly in today's post-cold-war era. Although successive governments often refer to the Bandung Spirit, especially in multilateral forums or commemorative events, its practical role in policymaking has been inconsistent and largely symbolic (Weber & Winanti, 2016). The normative principles of *Dasasila* are frequently set aside in favour of pragmatic political or economic interests, many of which are shaped by domestic concerns—particu-

larly during 10 years of Joko Widodo's tenure (Aryani, 2019). As global politics shifted from Cold War bipolarity to a more fluid multipolar system, the space for ideologically driven foreign policy has narrowed. As a result, *Dasasila Bandung* currently functions more as a soft-power narrative rather than a consistently applied policy doctrine. This situation raises important questions about the continued relevance of the Bandung framework in shaping Indonesia's foreign policy, especially at a time when economic pragmatism has become a dominant force over ideological or moral considerations.

The Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) administrations showed a shift away from the moral values of the Bandung Spirit. Instead, their foreign policy was more opportunistic and focused on trying different approaches. At the time, the main priority was rebuilding domestic stability after the fall of Suharto, rather than promoting strong ideals on the global stage (Anwar, 2020). During Megawati's presidency, Indonesia became even less involved in international affairs. Foreign policy during this period was mostly limited and reactive (Hamilton-Hart & McRae, 2015). In contrast, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) worked to improve Indonesia's image in the world. His administration promoted active diplomacy, strengthened ASEAN, and introduced the "thousand friends, zero enemies" policy. Although this partly brought back the spirit of Bandung, this effort fell short of fully reviving and realizing the spirit of Bandung, as Indonesia struggled to adapt to the complexities of a multipolar world order and

various global dynamics (Umar, 2023).

Joko Widodo's administration has continued this practical approach by focusing on building economic partnerships and promoting infrastructure through diplomacy. Even though Indonesia has hosted major events like the G20 Summit, ASEAN Chairmanship, and gained seats on the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council, the main goals have been more about economic benefits than promoting strong values (Poole, 2015). Rizal Sukma (2011) describes this as "post-normative pragmatism," where economic interests are more important than ideals. This situation brings up an important question: if Indonesia's current foreign policy is mostly shaped by liberal economic goals, can *Dasasila Bandung* still be seen as its main principle?

Since its inception, *Dasasila Bandung* has faced a very different global environment. The Cold War era, which once supported Indonesia's choice to stay non-aligned, has been replaced by a more multipolar and fragmented international system. New global powers, especially China, have changed the way international politics works. At the same time, regional institutions and non-state actors have become more important in global diplomacy. Traditional multilateral institutions have become weaker, and foreign policy is now more often shaped by economic interests (Kharas, 2017). Indonesia, like many other countries, has shifted towards more transactional diplomacy and careful balancing acts, rather than following fixed ideologies (Poole, 2015). Because of these changes, there is less room to apply *Dasasila Bandung*

in the same way as it was used in the past.

Even with these changes, the Bandung Spirit still holds some value, mostly as a soft-power message rather than a clear policy guide. It remains a symbol, especially in Global South forums, where messages of solidarity, mutual respect, and anti-colonial history are still meaningful. However, its role in shaping Indonesia's actual foreign policy has become more limited and occasional. Today, the principles of *Dasasila* are mostly used in speeches to show moral leadership or to connect with Indonesia's diplomatic history. In practice, contemporary foreign policy is now more influenced by economic interests, regional strategies, and practical goals. Hence, the Legacies of Bandung may still be relevant for today, but more as a flexible reference than a strict set of rules.

The Future of Bandung: Challenges and Opportunities

This part explores the relevance of the Bandung Conference in the modern era by assessing both the challenges that hinder its revival and the opportunities that could bring its principles back to the forefront of global diplomacy. Originally, the Bandung Conference provided postcolonial nations with a platform to assert their independence in a global system dominated by Cold War rivalries. The conference reframed the concept of the "Third World" from a marginal category to a collective force advocating for decolonization, equality, and non-alignment (Acharya, 2014). However, the world today operates within a vastly different geopolitical and economic landscape. The Cold War's

bipolar structure has given way to a multipolar order, where power is distributed among various state and non-state actors. Economic pragmatism, strategic competition, and regionalism now shape global interactions, raising questions about Bandung's viability as a guiding framework for contemporary diplomacy.

To make a fair assessment, this section compares Bandung's original context with today's international realities. It examines whether Bandung's core principles—such as South-South cooperation and anti-imperialism—still hold practical value in a world dominated by trade agreements, digital globalization, and shifting power centres. It also evaluates how Indonesia's own domestic and foreign policy priorities have evolved, affecting its ability to champion Bandung's vision.

Challenges: Bandung in a Fragmented World

Despite its historical significance, Bandung's ideals face substantial challenges in today's global order. One major obstacle is the structural imbalance of international institutions. Organizations such as the UN, IMF, and World Bank continue to reflect the interests of wealthier nations, making meaningful reforms difficult (Phillips, 2016). During the Cold War, Bandung positioned itself as a counterweight to superpower dominance, but in the modern era, economic dependencies make it harder for nations like Indonesia to maintain true non-alignment.

For instance, Indonesia's reliance on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for infrastructure development has deepened its

economic interdependence. In 2022, Chinese direct investment in Indonesia reached $4.55 billion, more than double the $2.2 billion recorded in 2021 (Kurmala, 2024). Similarly, trade with the United States remains significant, totalling nearly $31 billion annually (Mada, 2023). These dependencies create tensions between Bandung's vision of independent development and the realities of global economic integration. Unlike during the 1950s, when developing nations sought unity against external domination, today's priorities revolve around economic competitiveness and access to global markets.

Domestically, Indonesia's political landscape has also shifted away from Bandung's legacy. Sukarno's commitment to anti-imperialist leadership faded under Suharto's pro-Western pragmatism, and subsequent administrations have largely prioritized economic growth over ideological foreign policy goals (Parameswaran, 2015). President Joko Widodo, for example, has focused on infrastructure development and investment-friendly policies rather than reviving Bandung's diplomatic agenda. Additionally, alternative frameworks such as BRICS, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the Indo-Pacific strategies of major powers have provided developing nations with more immediate economic benefits than the broader ideals of Bandung.

In this fragmented global order, Bandung's vision faces competition from these newer economic and geopolitical alliances. Many developing nations now prioritize practical partnerships over

ideological solidarity, making the prospect of a Bandung revival increasingly challenging.

Opportunities: Revitalizing Bandung in a Multipolar Era

Despite these challenges, Bandung's principles still hold potential in addressing global inequalities. As the world grapples with issues such as climate change, economic injustice, and migration crises, the need for collective action among Global South nations remains strong. Bandung's legacy can be adapted to these contemporary issues, emphasizing fair trade, climate justice, and technology-sharing as new pillars of South-South cooperation.

For instance, Indonesia has an opportunity to lead in global climate negotiations by leveraging its environmental assets. The country's carbon credit potential, estimated at Rp8,000 trillion, spans sectors such as forestry, land use, and energy (BSN, 2024). By aligning Bandung's principles with sustainability efforts, Indonesia could position itself as a champion of equitable climate policies that benefit developing nations. Similarly, initiatives like fair digital trade agreements and technology partnerships within the Global South could modernize Bandung's economic agenda, ensuring that developing countries have greater agency in shaping global norms.

Multilaterally, Indonesia can use platforms like the G20 to advocate for fair economic policies that align with Bandung's original vision. For example, promoting climate financing mechanisms that prioritize developing nations could challenge existing

global inequalities in sustainability policies. Similarly, advocating for trade policies that improve market access for Global South economies aligns with Bandung's push for economic self-determination. These efforts would allow Indonesia to integrate Bandung's ideals into the structures of modern global governance rather than treating them as historical rhetoric.

Regionally, ASEAN presents another avenue for Bandung's renewal. While ASEAN's principle of non-interference makes it difficult to pursue collective political agendas, economic and environmental cooperation remains viable. Indonesia can leverage its regional influence to promote fair trade practices, climate adaptation programs, and technology-sharing partnerships, reinforcing Bandung's vision of mutual development. Additionally, strengthening ties between ASEAN, African, and Latin American nations through diplomatic and economic collaborations could extend Bandung's legacy into contemporary South-South relations.

Beyond diplomacy, cultural and educational initiatives can help sustain Bandung's relevance. Indonesia can integrate Bandung's history and values into school curricula, ensuring future generations understand its significance. International forums, youth summits, and academic exchanges focused on Global South cooperation could serve as modern interpretations of Bandung's ideals. Even symbolic actions, such as hosting commemorative events or launching new Bandung-themed international initiatives, could renew interest in its message.

Conclusion

The Bandung Conference will always be remembered as a defining moment in postcolonial history, but its future depends on Indonesia's ability to adapt its principles to modern realities. While economic dependencies and shifting global alliances present significant challenges, new opportunities exist for Bandung's revival in the areas of climate diplomacy, economic justice, and South-South cooperation. If Indonesia is willing to update Bandung's ideals and align them with contemporary global issues, it can reclaim its role as a leader of the Global South. The question is no longer whether Bandung's vision is outdated, but whether Indonesia and like-minded nations are prepared to transform it into a practical framework for today's world.

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Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

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Diplomacy has long played a pivotal role in shaping international relations, yet much of the scholarly literature remains Western-centric, often overlooking the rich traditions and histories of non-Western countries. A key yet frequently neglected moment was the 1955 Bandung Conference, where newly independent Asian and African nations asserted their agency on global stage. Championing non-alignment and solidarity, the conference demonstrated that formerly colonized and marginalized people could articulate and define their own approaches to international relations. This paper takes 1955 as a starting point and addresses these gaps by conducting the first-ever systematic literature review of diplomacy strategies in Southeast Asian (SEA) countries. A total of 92 articles were analyzed using the theory of ideational power, alongside an examination of domestic and international factors shaping these strategies. Taken together, SEA countries employ diverse diplomatic strategies, often favoring informal approaches that emphasize neutrality, foster warm sentiments, and create positive atmospheres. At times, they adopt assertive strategies, such as dismissing opposing ideas or referencing historical events to strengthen their position. Another feature of SEA diplomacy is its strategic positioning among global powers and regional organizations, consistently leveraging their stance. These strategies are shaped by a combination of factors, including leadership, cultural and religious identity, colonial legacies, international pressures, and the role of ASEAN. Reflecting on Bandung's ideals and the role of ideas in SEA countries, this paper advocates for decolonizing diplomacy by challenging Western-centric narratives and promoting a more inclusive, historically informed understanding of diplomatic practices that values diverse perspectives and experiences.

Keywords: *non-western diplomacy, decolonizing diplomacy, diplomacy strategies, southeast asian diplomacy*

Introduction

"Diplomacy is the conduct of international relations" (Bull, 1977, p. 157). Despite its significance as an everyday mechanism of interaction between nations and political entities, the "study of diplomacy remains marginal" (Sharp, 1999, p. 34). Diplomacy has even been referred to as "the poor child of international relations" (Pouliot and Cornut, 2015, p. 1). While the study of diplomacy is already marginal within the field of International Relations (IR), it also

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

*Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast
Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies*

suffers from a major bias: much of diplomacy is rooted in and focused on Western experiences and perspectives (Acharya and Buzan, 2009; Neumann, 2019). Neumann (2005) states, "When I begin by associating diplomacy with 'the West', it is not only because the site of my work […] but because diplomacy has a Western history" (p. 72). As a result, region- and country-specific features and dynamics of diplomacy outside the West tend to be disregarded.

This situation sustains misleading generalizations on diplomacy, despite recognition that diplomacy varies across different political contexts and entities (Beier, 2009; Opondo, 2010). Scratching the surface, Meerts (2015) characterizes major differences between Western diplomatic approaches and those in regions, such as Africa and Asia: "Different cultures have different perceptions of negotiation processes. Americans and Europeans tend to see the process in a linear way", adding that, "In Africa, and foremost in Asia, negotiators tend to see the process as circular" (p. 33). This linear approach is to conceive and conduct diplomacy as a 'formal' and 'sequential' process geared at clearly defined goals. In contrast, the 'circular' approach views diplomacy as a dynamic process, lacking a clear beginning and end, and not always following a standardized format (Meerts, 2015).

Our foundational argument is that diplomacy also has a non-Western history. This history is shaped by processes of decolonizaton in general and the Bandung Conference in particular. At this conference, hosted by Indonesia in 1955, 29 newly independent countries from Africa and Asia opposed colonialism and adopted the Bandung declaration: a set of 10 principles for a new international order, including respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, and promotion of mutual interest and cooperation (Abdulgani, 2011). Scholars have argued that the conference even served as the foundation of decoloniality (Mignolo, 2011) and the key shaper of the modern multipolar order (Umar, 2019). With regard to diplomatic styles or approaches, Acharya and Tan (2008) highlight that one important normative outcome of the conference was the preference for "non-intrusive, informal and consensus-based diplomacy over legalistic and formal organisastions" (p. 10). Roeslan Abdulgani (1964), the secretary-general of the Bandung Conference, also remarked on what defines the "Bandung Spirit", highlighting its emphasis on dialogue-centered diplomacy that respects national sovereignty while promoting solidarity and peaceful coexistence. All of this served as a powerful testament and pivotal moment, showing that the colonized, the oppressed, and the subaltern, too, can speak—defining and redefining their own approach to international relations.

Whilst the differences between Western diplomacy strategies and that of Asian and African countries have been acknowledged, in our view, studies focusing on the latter remain scarcely explored and, moreover, barely theorized. Derian (1987) begins his article by noting that "diplomacy has been particularly resistant to theory" (p. 91). This resistance stems from the

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

fact that much of the classical scholarship on diplomacy focuses on describing the practices of Western diplomats, such as François de Callières and Ernest Satow (Derian, 1987, pp. 91-2). As a result, there has been a tendency toward stagnation in the theorization of diplomacy, along with a continued reproduction of Western bias, influenced by Western diplomats who have long served as the 'champions' of traditional diplomatic studies.

In short, diplomacy as a field is marginalized, dominated by Western bias, and remains theoretically underdeveloped. To address these shortcomings, we have taken two steps: First, we shift our focus away from the West to highlight non-Western perspectives and experiences in diplomacy of Southeast Asia (SEA) countries. Through a systematic literature review (SLR), we assess the current state of knowledge on SEA diplomacy strategies, put on spotlight its distinct strategies as part of a broader effort to decolonize the field of diplomacy and challenge its dominant Western narratives. Second, we analyze SEA diplomacy strategies through the lens of the theory of ideational power (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2015). We reflect on the Bandung Conference to emphasize the role of 'ideas', which we argue is a foundational element in the diplomacy strategies of many Asian and African countries (Abdulgani, 1964, 2011; Wright, 1995). Our analysis investigates how SEA countries utilize ideas as part of their diplomacy strategies, and exert their influence through three distinct forms: the power *through* ideas, power *over* ideas, and

power *in* ideas. In an effort to contribute to theoretical development in understanding SEA diplomacy, we also distinguish between domestic and foreign factors that shape SEA strategies, highlighting their idiosyncratic features.

This paper presents the first-ever SLR on the diplomatic strategies of SEA countries, showing how SEA diplomacy operates through various forms of ideational power and is shaped by a range of domestic and foreign factors, including the enduring influence of the Bandung Conference and its critique on colonialism and call for cooperation among non-western countries. This paper is structured around two research questions: (1) What are the diplomacy strategies employed by SEA countries? (2) What factors shape the diplomacy strategies of SEA countries? The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework; Section 3 outlines the methodology; Section 4 presents the results; Section 5 provides a discussion and concludes the paper.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper is drawn from Carstensen and Schmidt's (2015) work on ideational power. We further distinguish between domestic and foreign factors that shape diplomacy. This combination allows us to comprehensively review the literature on SEA, providing a nuanced understanding of 'ideas' in diplomacy strategies and exploring the domestic and foreign factors that shape them.

Figure 1 presents the overall theoretical framework.
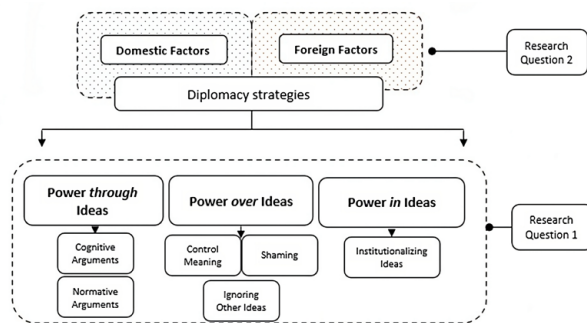
Ideational Power

Ideational power is defined as the ability to " influence other people's beliefs by promoting their own ideas" (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2015, p. 322). Given the importance of 'ideas' in the Bandung Conference (Abdulgani, 1964, 2011; Wright, 1995) and their role in driving political action, including in international relations (Blyth, 2002; Goldstein and Keohane, 2019), we use ideational power as the central element of our framework for understanding diplomacy strategies.

Carstensen and Schmidt (2015) distinguish three forms of ideational power. The first, power *through* ideas, refers to the ability to persuade others to adopt one's ideas, using cognitive arguments (to demonstrate coherence) or normative arguments (to appeal to public norms). We refer to this as the "persuasion strategy". The second form, power *over* ideas, is the ability to dominate the meaning of ideas through control of media, blaming and shaming, or 'remaining deaf' to other ideas. This form is more confrontational, and we label it the

"confrontation strategy." The third form, power in ideas, is the power to structure thought by embedding ideas within systems of knowledge, discursive practices, or institutions, making them appear natural and depoliticized. We refer to this more subtle form as the "hegemonization strategy".

Factors Shaping Diplomacy

Diplomacy is shaped by various domestic and foreign factors, as well as by the combination of these factors. Hocking (2016, p. 73) asserts that "the structures of diplomacy in any period reflect the character of international policy and the international and domestic environments in which they are located". A similar point is made by McGowan and Shapiro (1973), arguing that domestic and foreign factors play a crucial role in shaping foreign policy. Domestic factors play a crucial role as the context and driving force behind the formulation of foreign policy strategies. Meanwhile, foreign factors shape the broader environment in which a country engages with the international community. Reflecting on the work of these authors, we distinguish between domestic and foreign factors that shape diplomacy strategies, and focus on both. Domestic factors include domestic actors, historical contingencies, and cultural norms, while foreign factors encompass international actors, events, and institutions

Methodology

This paper employs a systematic literature review (SLR), following three sequential steps to collect, categorize, and

analyze data (Haddaway et al., 2018; James et al., 2016): (1) search strategy, (2) inclusion criteria, and (3) searching, screening, and coding.

Search Strategy

The scope of this SLR is limited to peer-reviewed scientific articles that have been published in English language in (one of) the following international research databases: *Scopus* and *Web of Science*. Our search strategy began by defining search strings and selecting keywords derived from our research questions, specifically "diplomacy strategies" and "Southeast Asian countries" (see, Appendix 1).

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria are defined by two key elements: "population," referring to individuals, groups, or institutions; and "activity," referring to actions or tasks performed by these population. We selecting only articles that met these requirements for the full-text screening process: (1) Population: diplomacy conducted by the state (or state actors) from individual SEA countries. List of SEA countries based on member states of ASEAN; (2) Activity: Diplomacy occurring between countries or interngovernmental organizations from 1955 onward (using the Bandung Conference as the starting point). This diplomacy should depict the use of 'ideational power' and include references to domestic and/or foreign factors.

Searching, Screening and Coding

The articles were searched and screened in March 2023. Based on the search strings (Appendix 1), 3,549 results were retrieved from *Scopus* and 2,520 from *Web of Science*. After removing duplicates and ineligible articles, and applying the inclusion criteria, 92 articles were selected for full analysis. These articles were subsequently analyzed using the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS. ti. Figure 2 illustrates the overall flow of the SLR in this article.

Figure 2. Flow diagram of SLR
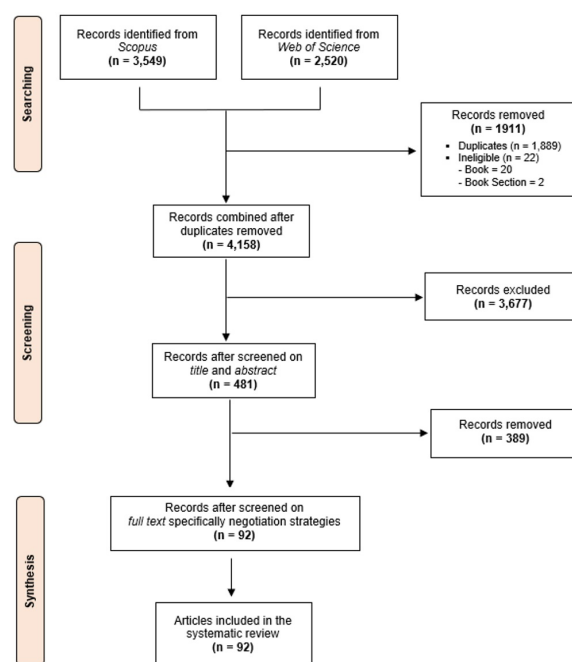
The final selection of 92 articles was then analyzed and coded deductively (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003), meaning our coding approach used predetermined codes based on the main elements of theoretical framework (see, Figure 1). For the first research question, ideational power was categorized into three codes corresponding

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

to its forms: power through ideas (Code 1A), power over ideas (Code 1B), and power in ideas (Code 1C). For the second research question, we assigned codes for domestic factors (Code 2A) and foreign factors (Code 2B).

Results

We begin by outlining the general characteristics of the reviewed articles, followed by an overview of the terms commonly used to describe SEA countries' diplomatic strategies. Next, we categorize these strategies based on the three forms of ideational power, and highlighting several notable examples. Finally, we provide an overview of the key factors shaping these strategies.

General Characteristics of The Reviewed Articles

The SLR encompasses a total of 92 articles. Figure 3 reveals that the five SEA countries with the highest number of publications also correspond to the five countries in the region with the largest GDPs in the region.

Figure 3. Geographical distribution of the reviewed articles
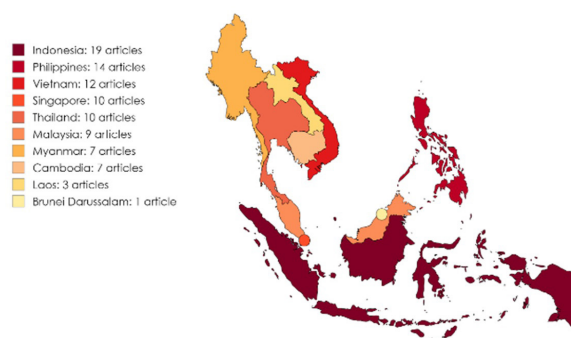
Table 1 presents the distribution of 'local' affiliations of the first author for each set of articles focused on a specific country. The table shows that slightly less than half of all articles have a first author affiliated with an institution based in a SEA country, indicating a relative strong, though not majority, presence of local authorship in publications on SEA diplomacy.

Table 1. First author affiliation of the reviewed articles

Country	Total Number of Articles	First author affiliated with an institution based in SEA
Brunei Darussalam	1	0
Cambodia	7	2
Indonesia	19	13
Laos	3	0
Malaysia	9	6
Myanmar	7	1
Philippines	14	9
Singapore	10	6
Thailand	10	3
Vietnam	12	7
Total	**92**	**47**

Figure 4 shows that the number of publications on SEA countries' diplomacy remained very low from the 1970s through the 2000s. It is worth noting that the Bandung Conference was likely not considered as a main subject of study at the time, and no

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

relevant articles (to be included as part of the analysis in our paper) were published during the decade in which the Bandung Conference took place. This could also reveal the limited academic focus on the conference in its formative years and highlight a broader pattern of overlooking non-Western diplomatic traditions in scholarly discourse.

Publications on SEA countries' diplomacy countries began to rise notably in the 2010s, peaking at 42 between 2010 and 2020. This upward trend continued into the 2020s, with 19 articles published in 2022 alone and a total of 39 recorded by March 2023. The rise in publications since the 2010s can likely be attributed to shifts in regional political dynamics, growing academic interest, and technical factors such as improved access to peer-reviewed publishing platforms. During this period, SEA countries also became more active in global affairs, especially through ASEAN's expanded role in regional disputes, economic cooperation, and security issues like the South China Sea. Their increased presence in forums such as the G20 and the UN also raised the region's profile in diplomatic studies. However, this does not necessarily imply that the Bandung Conference has explicitly become a primary subject of study in these publications.

Figure 4. Number of publications of the reviewed articles per decade
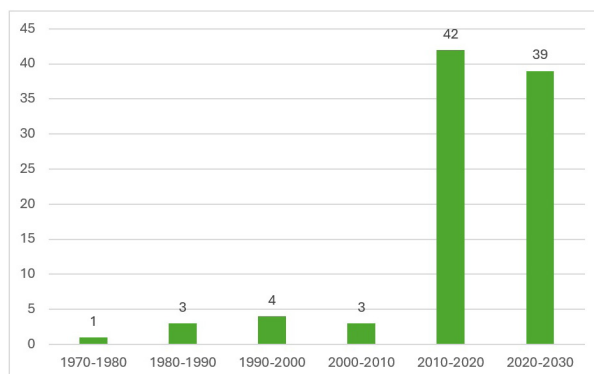
Terms Used to Characterize SEA Countries Diplomacy

The 92 articles reviewed contain a wide variety of terms used to describe the diplomatic strategies of individual SEA countries, as shown in Table 2. The terms can be categorized into three main categories.

The first category includes terms based on existing concepts or theories that have been adapted to fit the empirical context of SEA countries. For example, the concept of 'hedging,' which encompasses strategies to manage and mitigate uncertainties, has been tailored to the SEA context. This adaptation has led to terms like "strategic hedging" (Doung et al., 2022), "light hedging" (Lai and Kuik, 2020), and "cautious hedging" (Abuza, 2020). There are also country-specific variations, such as "Vietnam's hedging" (Tran and Sato, 2018), "Cambodia's hedging" (Leng, 2016), and "Myanmar's hedging" (Soong and Aung, 2020). These examples highlight that even for a concept like hedging, there is no single definition; context is essential. As Leng (2016) notes in the case of Cambodia, "…

hedging strategy towards Vietnam is unique, given the differences in its manifestation compared to the hedging strategies suggested in existing literature" (p. 1).

The second category includes terms that highlight cultural practices, materials, or values that are relatively unique to SEA countries. Examples include "dance diplomacy" (Espena, 2022; Kencana, 2022; Rogers, 2022), "gastrodiplomacy" (Lee and Kim, 2020), and "museum diplomacy" (Cai, 2013). Rogers (2022), for example, considers Cambodian dancers as "diplomats," suggesting they are "not simply liminal diplomatic actors" (p. 420).

The third category consists of terms that characterize specific foreign policy approaches and attitudes. Examples include "independent and active" (Arif, 2021; Laksamana, 2011), "million friends and zero enemy" (Amurwanti et al., 2021; Inkriwang, 2021), and "flexible diplomacy" (Suhrki, 1971).

Table 2. Example of Terms Used to Characterize Diplomacy Strategies of Individual SEA

Country	Terms	Characteristics
Brunei Darussalam	Low-diplomatic posture (Case, 1996)	Inward-looking with a tendency to be passive in international arenas
Cambodia	Strategic hedging (Doung et al., 2022) Cambodia's Hedging (Leng, 2016) Dance diplomacy (Espena, 2022; Rogers, 2022) Quiet diplomacy (Rogers, 2022)	Returns-maximizing and risk-contingency approach; Economic pragmatism and soft-balancing; Displaying neutrality through dance; Use of aesthetics to convey a desire for peace
Indonesia	*Intermestic* (Huijgh, 2017) Million friends and zero enemy (Amurwanti et al., 2021; Inkriwang, 2021) Independent and active (Arif, 2021; Laksamana, 2011) Revolutionary diplomacy (Cohen, 2019);	Building and projecting the identity of a democratic, modern, moderate Muslim-majority country; Emphasizes on positive and cooperative relations with all countries; Does not align itself with any major global powers; push for sovereignty
Laos	Autonomous diplomacy (Sayalath, 2015) Balanced diplomacy (Kishino, 2017)	Conduct and display its position as an autonomous country; Flexibility and balance towards many different countries
Malaysia	Dualistic forward diplomacy (Kuik et al., 2022) Light Hedging (Lai and Kuik, 2020) Diplomatic neutrality (Farzana and Haq, 2019) Cautious Hedging (Abuza, 2020)	Economic pragmatism and regional activism pursued hand-in-hand with strategic prudence; non-confrontational, quiet and low-profile approach; showing flexibility and accommodation towards powerful countries while also selectively asserting its own interests

Myanmar	Pendulum of non-alignment (Passeri and Marston, 2022) Myanmar's strategic culture (Shang, 2021) Balanced diplomacy (Fan and Zou, 2019)	Asserting independence and preserving autonomy; Not tolerating foreign interferences, pursue on self-reliance, and independent; maintain balance and harmony
Philippines	Emotional diplomacy (Enverga and Abalos, 2022) Diplomacy of dependency (Dingman, 1986) Balancing game (De Castro, 2007, 2010, 2016)	Using emotional expressions to pursue foreign policy objectives; Demonstrate an independent but loyal actions; Managing relationships with multiple countries or groups to advance national interests
Singapore	Gastrodiplomacy (Lee and Kim, 2020) Golf diplomacy and sport diplomacy (Chan and Brooke, 2019; Houlihan, 2014) Museum diplomacy (Cai, 2013) Equidistant diplomacy (Teo and Koga, 2021)	Promote a robust and favourable image of the country through its food; Establish stronger ties between countries (leaders) in a more casual setting; generate the image of political neutrality
Thailand	Dance Diplomacy (Kencana, 2022) Bamboo Diplomacy (Ashley and Shipper, 2022) Flexible Diplomacy (Suhrki, 1971) Omnidirectional (Cheow, 1986)	Projecting positive national image and promote cross-cultural understanding; flexible and adaptive approach; self-reliance, pragmatic and flexible
Vietnam	Vietnam's hedging (Tran and Sato, 2018) Cooperation and struggle (Thayer, 2016) Multi-polar balance (Ha, 2018)	Combination of diplomatic engagement, economic engagement, hard balancing, and soft balancing; engage in collaborative efforts where mutual interests align while minimizing risks that threaten its national interests; Maintain strategic autonomy and non-alignment

Many other terms also reflect principles of neutrality, flexibility, and autonomy, such as "non-alignment" (Passeri and Marston, 2022), "diplomatic neutrality" (Farzana and Haq, 2019), "balanced diplomacy" (Fan and Zou, 2019; Kishino, 2017), "balancing game" (De Castro, 2007, 2010, 2016), and "bamboo diplomacy" (Ashley and Shipper, 2022).

Three Types of Diplomacy Strategies
<u>Power Through Ideas: Persuasion Strategies</u>

Power through ideas, or persuasion strategies, refers to diplomacy strategies that aim to influence other actors through attractive and appealing arguments and/or sentiments. We identified two types of persuasion strategies: narrating neutrality and non-criticism; portraying warm sentiments (see, Table 3).

Table 3. Persuasion strategies of SEA countries

Strategies	Description
Narrating neutrality and non-criticism	Not taking sides or criticizing the domestic issues of other countries to maintain good relationships
Portraying warm sentiments	Creating and nurturing a positive atmosphere to foster friendliness and cooperation, contributing to a favourable image

The first type of persuasion strategy includes notable examples from Thailand to Vietnam, illustrating their attempts to narrating neutrality and non-criticism. During the Cold War, the world seemed split between two major opposing ideologies. While publicly appearing more aligned with the United States (US), both Thailand and the Philippines conducted 'quiet' diplomatic missions to build relations with communist countries (Punyaratabandhu and Swaspitchayaskun, 2020; Scalice, 2021). In the Philippines, this strategy even included collaboration with the national Communist Party—typically viewed as an political opponent—to help establish ties with the Soviet Union. This approach enabled both the Philippines and Thailand to extend their national interests by persuasively conveying that they were not strictly bound to a single ideology, thereby projecting their stance of 'neutrality'.

In more contemporary settings, Thailand and Myanmar participate in both Chinese-led and US-led Mekong Partnership initiatives (Doung et al., 2022; Ashley and Shipper, 2022). Although sometimes with opposing political interests, both countries attempt to leverage these relationships to maximize political and economic benefits, persuasively positioning themselves as 'neutral' and avoiding reliance on any single superpower. In another example, Teo and Koga (2021) conceptualize "equidistant diplomacy" by examining Singapore's approach, defining it as a strategy aimed at direct signaling a neutral image to target states.

Related to maintaining neutrality, a non-critical stance toward other nations is also a key component of this strategy. For instance, Vietnam remains "cautious and delicate in the context of rising rhetoric disadvantageous to China," particularly regarding the origins of COVID-19 (Dinh Tinh and

Thu Ngan, 2021, p. 318). Similarly, Malaysia has refrained from criticizing China's treatment of Uyghurs, with a minister describing alleged detention camps as training facilities (Abuza, 2020), contrasting with Malaysia's vocal stance on Muslim issues elsewhere (Abuza, 2020; Kuik et al., 2022). Likewise, Indonesia avoids sanctioning Myanmar over the discrimination and persecution of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group in Myanmar, opting instead for a persuasive, problem-solving approach as part of its "good neighbor foreign policy" (Rosyidin and Dir, 2021).

The second type of persuasion strategy includes several examples illustrating SEA countries' consistent efforts to convey warm sentiments. In Singapore, "golf diplomacy" played a key role when Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong strategically used a round of golf with the US president to strengthen bilateral relations (Chan and Brooke, 2019). Other informal activities, such as dinners and dances, also play an essential role in Thailand's and the Philippines' strategies to persuasively strengthen ties with their respective target states (Kotlowski, 2016; Tungkeunkunt and Phuphakdi, 2018). Portraying warm sentiments also appears through 'friendly' narratives. For example, both Thailand and Myanmar use terms that fosters a sense of closeness with China. Thailand emphasizes a "brotherly" relationship with China (Tungkeunkunt and Phuphakdi, 2018), while Myanmar highlights its bond through the *Pauk-Phaw* (kinship) narrative (Myoe, 2016). Another example of narratives used to persuasively foster friendliness is seen in Vietnam's focus

on building extensive friendships and becoming more open and market-oriented. This shift aligns with the *Doi Moi* (Renovation) reform policies, which opened the country to a broad range of international partners (Yeong, 1992; Tinh and Long, 2021).

Power Over Ideas: Confrontation Strategies

Power over ideas, or confrontation strategies, refer to diplomacy strategies that involve assertive actions to control and hold onto one's own ideas while disregarding or shaming the ideas of others. We identified two types of confrontation strategies: dismissing and downplaying; historical shaming (see, Table 4).

Table 4. Confrontation Strategies of SEA countries

Strategies	Description
Dismissing and downplaying	Discrediting the credibility or refuses to acknowledge or consider others' ideas
Historical shaming	Condemns and/or publicly calls out the historical actions or behaviour of others.

The first type of confrontational strategy is illustrated by cases in the Philippines, Laos, and Cambodia. Each of these countries appears "confrontational", yet this approach is a strategic component of their diplomacy, aimed at leveraging their positions and projecting greater autonomy. In the Philippines, this involved playing the "Russian card", signaling to their close partner, the US, that the Philippines had alternative political-economic alignment options with the Soviet Union if

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

its demands were not met (Beltran, 1988). In Laos's case, the country sought to assert its sovereignty and avoid the perception of being subordinate to Vietnam. When Vietnam's Vice Foreign Minister requested a meeting to discuss Laos' cooperation with the US, Laos responded by assigning a lower-ranking official, subtly yet confrontationally, signaling its intent to act independently in foreign affairs (Sayalath, 2015). In another example of downplaying criticism, Cambodia proceeded with China's dam-building projects in the Mekong River basin, despite criticism from neighboring countries like Thailand (Doung et al., 2022).

The second type of confrontational strategy is notably illustrated by the case of the Philippines (Enverga and Abalos, 2022; Kotlowski, 2016). During the 2017 State of the Nation Address, President Duterte demanded the return of the *Balangiga bells*, emphasizing their importance to Philippine history and framing their seizure by the US as an unjust act of colonial aggression. This approach increased pressure on the US by highlighting the colonial context. First Lady Imelda Marcos further reinforced this tactic, using rhetoric that invoked national pride and defiance in her dealings with the US. She referred to Indonesia as the "Dutch baby" and the Philippines as the "American baby," drawing on historical analogies to emphasize the Philippines' mistreatment by colonial powers. Her statement, "be good to your children," subtly warned the US to acknowledge and be ashamed of past injustices, suggesting that addressing these wrongs was necessary for maintaining a positive relationship with the Philippines.

Power In Ideas: Hegemonisation Strategies

Power in ideas, or hegemonisation strategies, is referring to diplomacy strategies to structure thought and embed certain ideas to be accepted through background ideational processes. We identified two types of hegemonisation strategies: leveraging on relationships with powerful countries or organizations; attaching interest through regional organizations (see, Table 5).

Table 5. Hegemonisation strategies of SEA countries

Strategies	Description
Leveraging relationships with powerful countries or organizations	Strategic use of relationships with more powerful countries or organizations to gain political and diplomatic backing
Attaching interest through regional organizations	Indirectly promoting national interests by embedding them within the activities of regional organizations

The first type of hegemonization strategy is illustrated by instances where SEA countries face threats or situations they perceive as unmanageable alone. In the case of the South China Sea, for example, the Philippines sought to avoid directly confronting China and quietly sought support from the US instead (De Castro, 2016). In another case, Thailand responded to perceived threats from Vietnam by rebuilding military and political alliances with both the US and China. By securing support from two major powers, Thailand mitigated risks and projected an

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

image of strength and strategic importance. Additionally, hegemonisation also can be achieved through strategic use of multilateral organization (Dent, 2002; Ha and Le, 2021; Pietrasiak and Pieczara, 2019). For instance, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has allowed countries like Singapore to advance their economic interests. The Ministry of Trade and Industry emphasized this by stating, "Singapore places the highest priority in the multilateral trading system" (Dent, 2002, p. 153). Similarly, the Philippines has actively engaged in coalition-building efforts within the WTO, collaborating with groups like the G20 and G33, thereby enhancing its bargaining power on the global stage (Tadem, 2015; Quinsaat, 2012).

An example of the second type of hegemonization strategy can be seen in Brunei Darussalam's role as the host of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1995. Brunei leveraged this opportunity to enhance its diplomatic presence and advocate for faster ASEAN free trade, ultimately benefiting the country itself (Case, 1996). Similarly, Cambodia strategically used its position as ASEAN Chair to engage with Myanmar, despite criticism from other countries over Myanmar's military junta rule. Cambodia deflected this criticism by citing "ASEAN diplomatic principles" (Bennett, 2021; Bunthorn, 2022). When Laos' position was questioned, it justified its actions with the narrative of "ASEAN shield" or "we go along with ASEAN" (Kishino, 2017, p. 99). Southeast Asian countries also actively engaged in ASEAN's multilateral processes, particularly in dealing with China. For example, Malaysia collabo-rated with other ASEAN members to develop a Code of Conduct (COC) for managing conflicts in disputed waters, thus avoiding direct confrontation with China (Kuik, 2013; Lai and Kuik, 2020). Similarly, Thailand employed strategic manoeuvring through ASEAN in its negotiations with China, aiming for a win-win outcome in the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Punyaratabandhu and Swaspitchayaskun, 2020). By engaging with ASEAN, Southeast Asian countries advanced their diplomatic agendas, navigated regional challenges, and maximized their influence on the global stage (literature examples: Case, 1996; Kuik, 2013; Vu Thi, 2022).

Key Factors that Shaped Diplomacy Strategies

Diplomacy strategies are situated within and influenced by a complex interplay of various factors. In this paper, we identify the key factors that shape the diplomatic strategies of SEA countries by distinguishing between domestic and foreign influences:

Table 6. Key influential factors that shaped SEA diplomacy strategies

Categories	Key Influential Factors
Domestic factors	• Domestic leaders • Cultural and religious identity • War and Colonial Legacies
Foreign factors	• International pressure and issues • ASEAN and the 'ASEAN Way'

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast
Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

Domestic Factors

Domestic Leaders

The reviewed articles show that SEA countries place a high value on leaders. In Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia, this is rooted in monarchies that have existed for over a hundred years, where individual rulers (*devarajas*, raja or sultan) made critical inter-state decisions and were even often perceived as representations of 'God' on earth (Milner, 2019; Rattanasengchanh, 2016). These significant roles of individual leaders are still evident in contemporary practices. For example, in Malaysia, the enhanced bilateral relations between Malaysia and Syria were largely driven by Prime Minister Mahathir's personal relationship with Syrian President Al-Assad (Anthony et al., 2019). In Philippines, the assertive stance of the Philippines' President Duterte towards the US was influenced by his personal growing friendly relations with China (Enverga and Abalos, 2022), to some extent, reflecting what Tadem (2015) describes as "the monopoly of the executive" (p. 17). The personal relationships of leaders shape diplomatic stances and strategies, determining with whom and how closely they align (Thaiprayoon and Smith, 2014).

Similarly, Myanmar drastically shifted from an active to a passive foreign policy under Thein Sein's government (Chan, 2017; Myoe, 2017; Passeri and Marston, 2022). In the case of Indonesia, the country's diplomatic approach saw a notable shift between the administrations of President Yudhoyono and President Jokowi, which transitioned from an active and friendly engagement in international affairs under Yudhoyono to a more passive and pragmatic stance under Jokowi (Arif, 2021; Darwis and Putra, 2022). As noted by Agastia (2021, p. 318), Jokowi's "pragmatic, business-like approach" determines Indonesia's diplomatic approach. A final observation from our close reading of the reviewed literature is that the strategies of SEA leaders are often linked to regime survival. Fan and Zou (2019) describe this as 'the art of survival' in Myanmar, while Lim (2009) speaks of 'survival instinct' in his study on Singapore. In the case of Singapore, Tan (2015) noted that this kind of survival instinct has even created an impression of Singapore as "egoistical, conceited, and cares little for its neighbors" (p. 350). Leadership in this context then is about making calculated decisions that ensure the regime's continuity by balancing economic gains with political stability, highlighting the importance of being both pragmatic and adaptive (literature examples: Bennet, 2021; Ngeow and Jamil, 2022; Lim, 2009; Resos, 2014).

Cultural and Religious Identity

SEA covers an enormous variety of cultural and religious identities. In Indonesia, cultural identity rooted in Javanese traditions significantly influences actions and behaviors, including those related to international relations (Wardaya, 2012). We also observed frequent references to the broad concept of "cultural identity" as well as "national identity" as a factor shaping SEA countries' diplomatic strategies. Examples include Cambodia's dance diplomacy to Singapore's gastrodiplomacy both of which capitalize

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

on cultural identity to shape how diplomacy is operated and narrated to target states or institutions (literature examples: Espena, 2022; Lee and Kim, 2020).

Articles on SEA diplomacy also frequently reference two major religions: Islam and Buddhism. In the case of Islam, this religious identity eventually shapes how countries maintain their diplomatic relations. For Malaysia, the narrative of the *Ummah* (global Muslim community) frequently appears, reflecting its tendency to foster ties with other Islam majority countries such as Pakistan and Turkey. Similarly, Indonesia emphasizes its Muslim identity in managing relationships with the Middle East. As Huijgh (2017) observes, "For Indonesia, pitching an appropriate narrative to Muslim nations in the Middle East is important" (p. 772). In the case of Buddhism, Myanmar's neutrality is strongly influenced by the Buddhist principle that "the middle path is the best and the only way to the truth" (Shang, 2021, p. 94). Additionally, concepts such as *metta* (loving-kindness) and *upekkha* (equanimity) have shaped the foundations of Myanmar's diplomacy (Passeri and Marston, 2022). Similarly, Cambodia's diplomatic openness draws inspiration from the Buddhist principle of giving without expecting anything in return (Szatkowski, 2017).

War and Colonial Legacies

All SEA countries have experienced the profound impacts of colonialism and the Cold War. One of the most apparent effects of these experiences has been their influence on the diplomacy strategies, particularly on their adoption of 'neutrality' and 'non-alignment' (literature examples: Farzana and Haq, 2019; Shang, 2021; Fan and Zou, 2019). This reflects, to some extent, a historical understanding of the devastating consequences of external domination and geopolitical conflicts. As Shang (2021) notes, "This [colonial] historical event gave birth to the fear of great-power intervention" (p. 99). Even for Thailand, which did not directly experience colonialism, still affected by this historical legacies and of feeling "being a vulnerable state in an international environment dominated by colonial and great powers" (Raymond, 2020, p. 43).

Shang (2021) also highlights how colonial legacies shaped Myanmar's foreign policy to be 'active and independent,' a principle similar to Indonesia's *bebas aktif* (independent and active) stance and shared by Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam (literature examples: Doung et al., 2022; Leng, 2016; Myoe, 2016). The Bandung Conference is also occasionally referenced to explain why several SEA countries have developed 'neutrality' or relatively unique approaches to diplomacy (literature examples: Espena, 2022; Shimazu, 2013; Wardaya, 2012). For instance, Espena (2022, p. 497) highlights how "…neutrality was solidified at the 1955 Bandung Conference, where Cambodia committed to following a 'Third Way' amidst the apparent bipolarity of the Cold War". These war and colonial legacies not only shaped their diplomacy strategies, but also influence how they frame their roles and relationships in the international relations.

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

Foreign Factors

International Pressures

SEA countries exhibit a high sensitivity to international pressures, particularly when these pressures are perceived as 'sovereignty' threats involving major global powers, such as the US and China. Various articles have explored this dynamic, with a significant focus on the South China Sea (SCS) dispute and its implications for regional security and territorial sovereignty (literature examples: De Castro, 2016; Thang and Thao, 2012; Thayer, 2016). For instance, in the case of the Philippines, De Castro (2016) highlighted that the country's international outlook is heavily influenced by its contentious relationship with China over territorial claims in the SCS. Similarly, Vietnam's active security leadership within ASEAN is argued to be driven by its strategic imperative to protect its national interests in the SCS (Emmers and Le Thu, 2020). Lai and Kuik (2020) noted that "(global) power dynamics shape threat perceptions" (p. 3), which, in Malaysia's case, clearly shaped its strategy of hedging in the South China Sea dispute.

Another example involving the US is Thailand's shift in its diplomatic stance closer to China (Hewison, 2017), which was noted as "a way to punish the United States for its condemnation of the coup" (p. 5) against Thailand's elected government in 2014. As to Cambodia, the perceived threat came from the European Union (EU) after criticizing Cambodia's human rights situation, leading Cambodia to move away from the West and strengthen its relationship with China (Bennett, 2021). Bunthorn

(2022) noted that, "Western pressure in any form has never been a pleasure" (p. 127), to the extent that Prime Minister Hun Sen tended to interpret it as a direct threat to the survival of his regime. Putting it all together, these examples illustrate how international pressures drive states to adapt and shape or reshape their diplomacy strategies to safeguard sovereignty, maintain stability, and navigate the complexities of geopolitics.

ASEAN and the 'ASEAN Way'

Reviewed articles highlight ASEAN as a crucial diplomatic component for many SEA countries. Initially established to unite countries grappling with the influence of communism in the region (Nair, 2022), ASEAN has since evolved into a collective platform enabling all SEA countries to navigate the complexities of global politics. Articles we reviewed also highlighted its contributions to regional economic integration and market stability, which enhance the global competitiveness of SEA economies (literature examples: Case, 1995; Cheow, 1986; Emmers and Le Thu, 2021). ASEAN is especially beneficial for smaller or middle-power countries. For instance, ASEAN amplifies Brunei's voice within larger international trade blocs (Case, 1996). For Vietnam, ASEAN has served as a "tool that facilitates Vietnam taking on the typical roles of a middle power" (Dinh Tinh and Thu Ngan, 2021, p. 309) and has even become the bridge to larger economic forums, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (Dutta, 1995). Myanmar's active participation in ASEAN also both shapes

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

and facilitates its engagement in regional diplomacy. Passeri and Marston (2022) argue that Myanmar's involvement in ASEAN signals its openness to international markets and willingness to take part in regional decision-making.

Meanwhile, the 'ASEAN Way,' or 'ASEAN Spirit,' as a set of norms among ASEAN countries, has apparently shaped their strategies to prioritizing non-interference and peaceful resolutions in diplomacy (literature examples; Gindarsah, 2016; Rosyidin and Dir, 2021; Smith and Williams, 2021). For example, in addressing the Rohingya crisis, Indonesia adhered to the 'ASEAN Way' by advocating for dialogue rather than punitive measures. Smith and Williams (2021) note that this framework has encouraged Indonesia to maintain consistent cooperation with Myanmar, emphasizing their shared bond as part of the "ASEAN family". In another example, this norm has been instrumental in diffusing regional tensions, such as easing disputes between Singapore and Indonesia following the execution of Indonesian soldiers during the military confrontation of 1963–1965 (Chong, 2010).

Discussion and Conclusion

After systematically reviewing on diplomacy straegies of SEA countries, the following observations can be made: First, SEA countries have consistently aimed to position themselves, or at least project their position, as 'neutral' and occupying the 'middle ground'. In other words, it is not about choosing sides between the 'West' or 'East',

but rather making the most of opportunities from both. Our reviewed articles underscore how SEA countries navigate strategically, moving beyond binary macro-narratives and crafting their own paths. This is not about adhering to a single diplomatic path, but rather embracing a multidirectional route, mobilizing different types of ideational power.

Both the middle ground positioning and specific ways of using ideational power reflect the spirit of the Bandung Declaration of 1955: the persuasion strategy of non-criticism and narrating neutrality echoes the principle of respect for territitorial integrity; the confrontation strategy of historical shaming mimics the very clear opposition of the Bandung Declaration against colonialism; the hegemonisation strategy of promoting regional organisation and the ASEAN Way reflect the principle of mutual cooperation and developing a 'Third Way'. In other words, the Bandung Declaration has very much shaped diplomacy strategies of SEA countries.

The legacies of the Bandung Conference, however, have also been 'reshaped' over time by significant political and dramatic changes at both national and regional levels. For instance, the reviewed articles highlight the importance of ASEAN and its 'ASEAN Way,' which, while echoing the spirit of peaceful coexistence and non-interference from the conference, grounded in a different framework. ASEAN is primarily grounded in a pragmatic political and economic agenda and often appears detached from fundamental concerns such as human

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

rights and anti-imperial politics, which were central to the conference. Yet, the reviewed articles still also highlight the enduring 'normative' legacies of the conference, particularly in how terms like "independent and active" and "non-alignment" continue to appear and influence SEA countries' diplomacy strategies. This includes other terms or connotations uniquely expressed through metaphors, such as "million friends and zero enemies", "*mendayung antara dua karang*" (rowing between two reefs), "equidistant", to simply "balanced", which remain central to the diplomatic strategies of SEA countries.

Second, SEA countries often show a strong preference for informal strategies. From dancing to dinner, these activities are integral to many SEA countries diplomatic activities. We argue that this preference is driven not only by the desire to alleviate tensions from asymmetrical power relations but also by a deep-seated identity shaped by a history of oppression and repression during colonial rule (Wright, 1995; Rodney, 1972). Now, with greater agency, SEA countries can openly assert and exercise their identity. Free from rigid formalities and conventional protocols, they have the opportunity to present themselves on their own terms. This also demonstrates that SEA countries now stand on equal footing with all other nations. They can even take the initiative to actively invite these countries, including those from the West, into informal spaces where their once-repressed identities can now be openly celebrated and shared. Through these interactions, they not only challenge

entrenched power hierarchies but also create more spaces and opportunities for mutual understanding and recognition. Furthermore, this highlights that diplomacy strategies in SEA countries are not solely about 'winning the game' or 'agenda setting,' but rather about 'shifting the frame' and 'atmosphere setting'. Evidence also suggests that diplomacy in SEA countries often deviates from the linear and formal approaches typically associated with Western diplomacy, as noted by Meerts (2015, p. 33). Instead, it encompasses a variety of strategies and directions, with additional layers of expression and nuance. Many of these strategies are informal and involve a circular process, often without the intention of achieving a definitive conclusion. This approach stands in contrast to the more straightforward and goal-oriented practices commonly observed in Western diplomacy. By embracing flexibility and creativity, SEA countries demonstrate a distinctive and adaptive diplomatic style, reflective of their unique identities and historical experiences.

Third, reflecting on the theoretical aspect, all forms of ideational power are utilized in various ways, leading to diverse diplomacy strategies in SEA countries. These strategies, shaped by both domestic and foreign factors, are deeply interconnected, as illustrated in Figure 5. Our bottom-line argument is that understanding diplomacy, especially in SEA and the Global South, requires moving beyond surface-level interpretations to dive deeper into the underlying 'ideas' and grasp the bigger picture. These ideas and broader frameworks are essential for understanding not just the diplomacy strategies, but

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

also how they reclaim agency, challenge hegemonic narratives, and advocate for alternative worldviews that reflect their unique histories, cultures, and priorities. However, the dynamic nature of these ideas raises practical concerns about the concept of ideational power itself. Ideational power does not adequately account for non-verbal symbols and communication, which are particularly important for SEA countries. For example, during "dance diplomacy", dancers persuasively conveyed messages without speaking a single word or engaging in direct argumentation. This highlights the vital role non-verbal expressions play in influence other people's beliefs, yet such expressions remain largely underexplored.
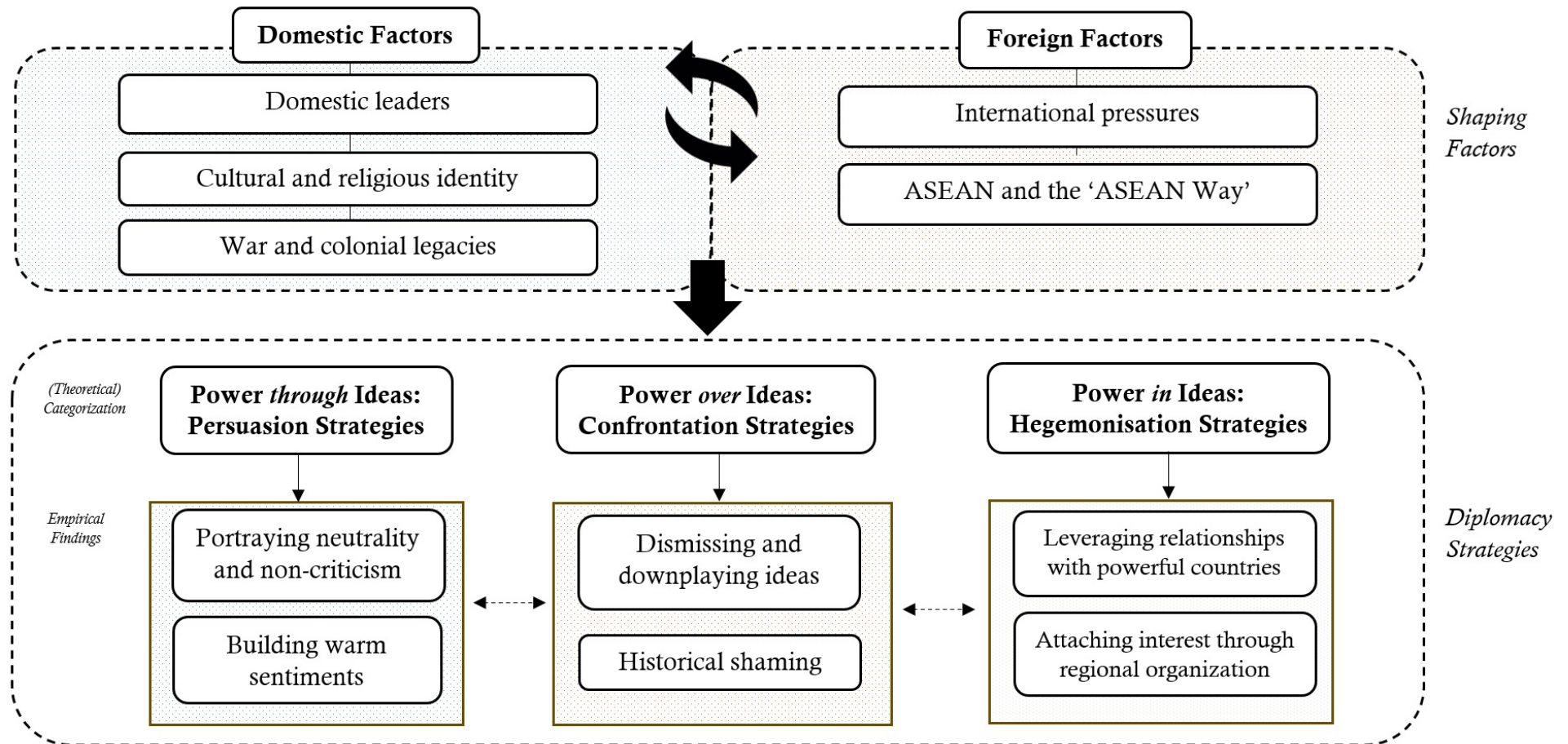
We recognize two main limitations of our paper: First, our analysis was limited to a SLR of articles published in peer-reviewed journals in the English language, based on a specific query and set of search terms, and sourced from only *Scopus* and *Web of Science*. Second, this paper provides only a general overview of the diplomatic strategies of SEA countries, without examining in detail their specific perspectives, strategic approaches, trajectories, or changes over time.

Given these limitations, we suggest two directions for future studies: First, future studies should adopt a more integrated approach and engage with literature published in local languages and in journals based at the local or regional level. This includes engaging with documents and publications that offer insights into both the Bandung Conference and SEA diplomacy beyond a purely academic scope. Second, more

in-depth analyses incorporating firsthand insights from both state and non-state actors in individual SEA countries are needed. Such studies should explore the diplomacy of each country by examining not only the role of ideas but also the interplay between domestic and international factors shaping their strategies. The concept of ideational power also should be complemented with approaches that could capture and engage with circularity and informality of diplomacy, especially at deeper agency level, such as practice theory (Pouliot and Cornut, 2015).

Last, to conclude the paper, we advocate for the decolonization of the field of diplomacy, and, more broadly, IR. This involves not only addressing the lingering influence of Western-centric biases, but also acts to counter the predominant reliance on and frequent idealizing of Western colonial orders and structures. This includes calls for rediscovering and actively incorporating the perspectives and influences of the Bandung Conference, and more importantly, indigenous approach on diplomacy and international relations that have been systematically suppressed and erased. We argue that this approach is essential as contributing toward reversing the 'imaginative geographies' of the West (Said, 1979), ultimately paving the way to transform and redefine both the fundamental approaches to and our understanding of diplomacy and IR.

Figure 5. Framework and overview of the results

Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

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Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

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Faris Rahmadian; Otto Hospes; Katrien Termeer

Decolonizing Diplomacy: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asian Countries' Diplomacy StrategiesAsian Countries' Diplomacy Strategies

Appendix
Appendix 1. Search strings

(Country)	AND	(Activity)
"Southeast Asia" OR "South East Asia" OR "South-East Asia" OR "Southeastern Asia" OR "Brunei" OR "Brunei Darussalam" OR "Cambodia" OR "Kingdom of Cambodia" OR "Indonesia" OR "Republic of Indonesia" OR "Laos" OR "Lao People's Democratic Republic" OR "Malaysia" OR "Myanmar" OR "Burma" OR "Republic of the Union of Myanmar" OR "Philippines" OR "Republic of the Philippines" OR "Singapore" OR "Republic of Singapore" OR "Thailand" OR "Kingdom of Thailand" OR "Vietnam" OR "Viet Nam" OR "Socialist Republic of Vietnam"		"diplomacy" OR "diplomatic" OR "diplomacies" OR "diplomacy strateg*" OR "diplomatic strateg*" OR "diplomacy style*" OR "diplomatic style*" OR "diplomacy technique*" OR "diplomatic technique*" OR "diplomacy approach" OR "diplomatic approach*" OR "negotiate" OR "negotiation*" OR "negotiating" OR "negotiation process*" OR "negotiation strateg*" OR "negotiation style*" OR "negotiation technique*" OR "negotiation method*" OR "negotiation approach*"

Indonesia Gender and Environmental Empowerment Contour:

An Ecofeminist Approach to Joko Widodo's Development Model

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This paper examines the contour of Indonesia's development under President Joko Widodo, focusing on three prominent megaprojects: the Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) new capital city project, nickel industry downstreaming, and the Food Estate program. Using an ecofeminist framework developed from previous key literature, this study assesses these projects through the lenses of inclusive participation and indigenous integration, sustainability, and environmental justice. Ecofeminism critiques development models that prioritize economic growth over ecological and social well-being, often at the expense of marginalized communities and the environment. This research adopts a qualitative approach, relying on internet-based data collection from official statements, media sources, and relevant academic articles. The findings reveal that, while these projects are framed as drivers of economic progress, they frequently sideline local communities, overlook sustainable practices, and worsen environmental inequalities. The study highlights the lack of indigenous participation and the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens, reinforcing the need for a more just and inclusive approach to development in Indonesia. This analysis addresses a gap in previous studies on Indonesian development, which have seldom applied a macroscopic ecofeminist perspective to Jokowi's policies. The findings therefore suggest the importance of integrating local knowledge and sustainable practices in future and existing development endeavors.

Keywords: *ecofeminism, Joko Widodo, Indonesia Development Policy, Indonesia Megaprojects, Ibu Kota Nusantara, nickel downstreaming, food estate, sustainability, environmental justice, inclusivity*

Introduction

Under President Joko Widodo's (popularly known as Jokowi) leadership, Indonesia's development agenda has centered around state-led megaprojects designed to stimulate economic growth and industrial competitiveness. From 2015 to 2024, the government allocated over IDR 6,400 trillion (~USD 410 billion) toward national strategic projects, ranging from infrastructure and energy development to food and resource security programs (Bappenas, 2020). Among these, three initiatives stand out in terms of scale, environmental footprint, and social implications: the Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) new capital city relocation project, the downstreaming of the nickel industry, and the national food estate program.

These projects share common characteristics: high land-use demands,

intensive natural resource extraction, and significant socio-ecological transformation. IKN, for example, spans over 256,000 hectares of forest-rich terrain in East Kalimantan and is projected to displace dozens of indigenous communities whose customary rights are not fully protected under national land-use law (Buana et al., 2022; Simarmata, 2023). The nickel industry, centered in Sulawesi, has seen a fivefold increase in output since 2017, positioning Indonesia as the world's largest producer but also contributing to widespread deforestation, river pollution, and land conflicts in mining regions (Ilham et al., 2017; Kurniawan et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the food estate program has been implemented across over 165,000 hectares, including fragile peatland ecosystems in Central Kalimantan and Papua, triggering carbon emissions, ecological degradation, and the marginalization of local and indigenous farmers (Bayu et al., 2023; Maskun et al., 2021).

Despite their strategic importance, these projects have received limited critique beyond economic or technical perspectives. There is a notable gap in scholarship addressing how these development models reproduce structural inequalities, particularly those that affect women, indigenous communities, and the environment. This is where ecofeminism becomes an important analytical framework. Unlike conventional approaches, ecofeminism foregrounds the intersection of gender, ecological sustainability, and power. It critiques development models that prioritize economic gain at the expense of local communities and ecosystems—especially in the Global South where both women and nature are often simultaneously exploited under capitalist-patriarchal systems (Mies & Shiva, 1993; Warren, 2000; Plumwood, 1993).

Applying an ecofeminist lens allows for a deeper analysis of the power asymmetries embedded in Jokowi's development policies. It exposes how large-scale environmental transformation is often carried out through centralized, technocratic planning that marginalizes grassroots perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). It also highlights the disproportionate burden placed on women and indigenous communities, both of whom play critical roles in sustaining natural ecosystems. By focusing on three of the most prominent and environmentally consequential projects under Jokowi's administration, this paper aims to explore how Indonesia's development trajectory aligns—or fails to align—with the principles of inclusive participation, sustainability, and environmental justice embedded within ecofeminist thought.

Methodology

The research question relevant to the writing purpose addressed in the previous part that this paper tries to address is: **"How does Joko Widodo's development model align with principles of ecofeminist perspective?"**. By examining large-scale development projects: *Ibu Kota Nusantara*; nickel industry downstreaming; and food estate, this research aims to critically assess whether these initiatives adhere to values emphasized within ecofeminist theory.

The decision to limit data collection to large-scale projects allows for a comprehensive analysis of overarching trends that define the development approach in a national context, as it helps capture the systemic and structural patterns in development strategies. The three projects were selected not only for their prominence in national development agendas but also because they represent some of the largest and most resource-intensive state-led initiatives under the Jokowi administration. Each involves significant public investment, wide-ranging policy coordination, and substantial physical and social impact. Moreover, they have drawn public and academic scrutiny for issues related to environmental degradation, land use conflicts, and the limited involvement of local and indigenous communities.

Further justification on the use of the three projects as case study necessitates a literature review on existing research:

- *Ibu Kota Nusantara* **(IKN)**, the ambitious new capital city project in East Kalimantan, has drawn considerable scholarly attention for its sheer scale and its potential to rebalance regional development in Indonesia. Covering an area of over 256,000 hectares, IKN has been conceptualized as a solution to the over-centralization of economic and political activity on Java and as a model of sustainable urban design (Aprianti et al., 2023). The project encompasses a broader developmental shift toward decentralization and has been framed within discussions of governance reform, environmental management, and spatial planning (Nugroho & Setijaningrum, 2023). Past writings (Berawi, 2022; Buana et al., 2022; Sulasno & Sucahyo, 2023) have highlighted the project's symbolic and practical implications for national identity, economic distribution, and global positioning, hence its central role in shaping the nation's long-term developmental vision.

- **Nickel industry downstreaming** has been the subject of studies focusing on industrial policy and resource-based development. Indonesia's position as the world's largest producer of nickel has enabled the government to craft policies aimed at transitioning from raw material exports to value-added production processes, such as nickel refining for electric vehicle (EV) batteries (Pandyaswargo et al., 2021). This initiative has been explored in the context of global energy transitions and Indonesia's aspirations to occupy a more competitive role in global value chains (Tan, 2022). Previous writings have noted that nickel downstreaming reflects Indonesia's strategic use of natural resources to foster industrial development, attract foreign investment, and reduce dependency on primary commodity exports (Rosada et al., 2023). Previous research has also underlined its broader implications for national

economic growth and its alignment with global trends in sustainable energy (Kusumawardhana & Permata, 2023).

- **Food estate**, positioned as a cornerstone of Jokowi's agricultural policy, has similarly attracted attention within academic literature and media discourse. Focused on large-scale agricultural production to enhance national food security, the program aims to address vulnerabilities in Indonesia's food system while optimizing underutilized land (Juhandi et al., 2023). Previous studies have contextualized this initiative within Indonesia's broader efforts to achieve food sovereignty and rural development, being optimistic in its potential in combating import dependency and enhancing agricultural productivity (Marwanto & Pangestu, 2021). Bayu et al. (2023) and Fadillah et al. (2021) have also provided insight into how this program reflects the government's attempt to balance immediate national needs with long-term sustainability objectives.

The conclusive framework of this paper applies an ecofeminist lens across three analytical pillars to interrogate Indonesia's development model through the previously discussed case studies. These pillars are based on different but complementary perspectives within ecofeminist theory. Using multiple approaches is necessary because

ecofeminism includes a range of ideas and priorities; each thinker focuses on different aspects of the relationship between gender, the environment, and development. Relying on just one viewpoint—whether it be Warren's ethics of care, Plumwood's critique of human-nature separation, or Mies & Shiva's emphasis on subsistence and indigenous knowledge— would risk oversimplifying the complexities of Indonesia's development dynamics. Therefore, this framework consists of the following pillars:

- **Inclusive participation & indigenous integration** focuses on assessing the extent to which Indonesia's development policies foster inclusive decision-making and integrate indigenous knowledge systems. Inclusive participation requires meaningful involvement of marginalized groups, particularly indigenous women, in environmental governance processes. Policies and programs must be evaluated for their ability to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and ensure fair representation in policy formation. Evidence suggests that when indigenous women are actively engaged in these processes, outcomes are more equitable and environmentally sustainable. Additionally, this aspect investigates whether mechanisms exist to empower these communities as stakeholders, rather than passive recipients of top-down development policies (Mies & Shiva, 1993; Warren, 2000; Theresia et al., 2020).

- **Sustainability** in this framework goes beyond environmental conservation to anthropocentrically encompass social and economic resilience. This pillar holistically sees whether development policies maintain ecological balance, protect biodiversity, and reduce environmental degradation. It also examines whether these projects align with long-term sustainability goals, such as carbon neutrality and ecosystem restoration (Plumwood, 1993; Juhandi et al., 2023).

- **Environmental justice**, centers on the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized communities. This pillar assesses whether development projects address systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect women and indigenous populations. Environmental justice also requires addressing ecological harm in ways that repair historical injustices and prevent future inequities. This includes examining whether compensatory mechanisms, like reforestation programs or land restoration projects, are equitably distributed and culturally appropriate for affected communities (Plumwood, 1993; Buana et al., 2022; Simarmata, 2023).

To justify and substantiate the use of this framework of analysis, a review of past literature on ecofeminism must be done. Several scholars had implied or outright provided the necessary theoretical grounding to apply ecofeminist principles to the Indonesian context:

- Mies and Shiva (1993) critique of development through the lens of a subsistence perspective provides a critical foundation for this study. Their argument that "development" as conventionally pursued often undermines ecological and social diversity resonates deeply in Global South contexts, where economic policies have historically marginalized indigenous communities and ecosystems. Their advocacy for localized, community-led approaches offers became a blueprint for exploring how inclusive and sustainable practices can emerge as alternatives to extractive development.

- Warren (2000) ecofeminist ethics emphasize inclusivity, interconnectedness, and an ethics of care as central to ecological and feminist praxis. Their framework stresses the importance of dismantling systems of oppression that simultaneously exploit women and the environment. This perspective also underscores the need for participatory frameworks in decision-making processes. Warren also engages critically with the roles of science, technology, and development—questioning their assumed neutrality and examining how they often perpetuate gendered and ecological hierarchies.

- Plumwood (1993) extends the perspective through their critique of dualistic thinking that separates humans from nature and legitimizes dominant hierarchies. Their deconstruction of binaries—such as culture versus nature or male versus female—challenges the philosophical underpinnings of conventional development model. Plumwood's contribution can be used to analyze how development can move toward more holistic, equitable paradigms that recognize ecological interconnectedness and social justice.

Data for this study will be sourced from a variety of internet-based platforms, including official government statements, policy documents, scientific articles, and online media reports. By synthesizing information from both official and alternative sources, the study aims to capture not only the government's developmental intentions but also the voices of local communities, activists, and scholars who engage with these issues critically. The data will be analyzed through an interactive analysis framework, as suggested by Newman (2014). Interactive analysis involves systematically categorizing and interpreting data, often through graphical or narrative forms, to reach conclusions based on identified patterns within the research framework.

Results & Discussion

Ibu Kota Nusantara

The *Ibu Kota Nusantara* (IKN) project has been presented by the Indonesian government as a transformative step toward decentralizing development and reducing regional inequalities. By relocating the capital from Java to East Kalimantan, this initiative aims to rebalance the distribution of economic opportunities and public resources (Aprianti et al., 2023). However, while the overarching goals appear ambitious and forward-looking, the processes underpinning the project reveal significant concerns regarding inclusivity, sustainability, and environmental justice. Central to these concerns is the extent to which indigenous communities and marginalized groups have been meaningfully involved in the decision-making processes. In principle, Indonesia's legal framework reflects a commitment to public participation, as outlined in Article 37 of Law No. 3 of 2022 on the National Capital, which states that "communities can participate in the preparation, development, relocation, and administration of the local government of the special capital region". While this provision appears to promote inclusivity, its implementation has been critiqued for failing to engage communities at a meaningful level. Studies suggest that participatory efforts are often procedural, emphasizing information dissemination rather than genuine involvement (Nugroho & Setijaningrum, 2023). Indigenous groups, for example, are frequently informed about key developments rather than being invited to contribute to shaping the project (Gede & Mahayasa, 2023). This lack of meaning-

ful inclusion undermines the government's claims of equitable development and raises questions about the long-term social legitimacy of the project.

The planned construction of IKN overlaps with ancestral lands that hold deep cultural and ecological significance for indigenous communities. These lands are not merely spaces for habitation but serve as reservoirs of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), which could play a vital role in ensuring sustainable urban development (Buana et al., 2022). However, despite the legal guarantees of participation enshrined in Pasal 37, evidence of efforts to integrate TEK into the planning of the new capital is scarce, reflecting a broader neglect of indigenous perspectives (Simarmata, 2023). Local leaders and community representatives have voiced concerns over potential displacement, the erosion of cultural heritage, and the limited safeguards in place to protect their rights (Valentina & Elsera, 2023). As the project progresses, the risk of cultural alienation and dispossession grows, emphasizing the need for governance structures that move beyond formal provisions to ensure active and impactful participation. Without transparent mechanisms that actively incorporate the voices of indigenous peoples, the IKN project risks perpetuating historical patterns of marginalization, undermining the equity it aims to promote.

While the government has placed significant emphasis on the sustainability of IKN, framing it as a "smart, green, and sustainable city", the environmental realities tell a more complicated story. The project in-cludes ambitious plans for renewable energy systems, eco-friendly building designs, and low-emission transportation networks. Smart building management systems are expected to optimize energy use and contribute to improved health outcomes for residents (Sihite & Sucahyo, 2023). Furthermore, the incorporation of renewable energy sources, such as bioenergy and carbon capture technologies, aligns with Indonesia's broader commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2060 (Rino, 2023). These features highlight a vision of urban development that prioritizes environmental innovation. However, this vision is undermined by significant ecological risks associated with the project's implementation. Large-scale deforestation to clear land for construction has already resulted in habitat destruction, threatening the biodiversity of East Kalimantan and jeopardizing the ecological balance of the region (Nugraha et al., 2022). Critics argue that the sustainability rhetoric surrounding IKN does not align with the project's environmental footprint, as the emphasis on green development has yet to materialize in concrete, measurable outcomes (Berawi, 2022).

The tension between development and environmental preservation is emblematic of broader challenges in Indonesia's approach to sustainability. Without robust environmental impact assessments and strict accountability mechanisms, the ecological costs of IKN could outweigh its benefits. Habitat loss and the displacement of wildlife further illustrate the disconnect between the sustainability goals and the realities on the ground (Valentina & Elsera, 2023). To

address these contradictions, independent monitoring bodies must oversee the project's adherence to environmental standards, while ecological restoration initiatives should be implemented to compensate for the damage caused by urban expansion. Balancing economic growth with long-term ecological stewardship remains a critical challenge that the IKN project must address if it is to fulfill its sustainability aspirations.

The social implications of the IKN project extend beyond questions of inclusion and sustainability to the realm of environmental justice. The relocation and construction of the new capital disproportionately impact indigenous communities and women, who rely heavily on local ecosystems for their livelihoods (Buana et al., 2022). Land acquisition processes have often overlooked customary land rights, leading to displacement and the loss of access to essential natural resources (Simarmata, 2023). These practices perpetuate systemic inequalities, as the burdens of development are unequally distributed while the benefits remain inaccessible to many marginalized groups (Valentina & Elsera, 2023). Bureaucratic barriers and inequitable compensation policies have further compounded these challenges, leaving affected communities without viable alternatives for securing their livelihoods (Nugroho & Setijaningrum, 2023). Women, in particular, face unique vulnerabilities due to their exclusion from formal land ownership structures, which worsen their economic insecurity in the face of displacement (Buana et al., 2022).

Although the government promotes IKN as a symbol of equity and progress, the project risks reinforcing existing inequalities if historical injustices are not addressed. Achieving environmental justice within this framework requires a fundamental rethinking of how development is conceptualized and implemented. Land acquisition processes must adhere to principles of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) to ensure that affected communities are genuinely involved in decisions that shape their futures (Simarmata, 2023). Additionally, gender-sensitive policies are essential to empower women as key stakeholders in environmental governance. While Pasal 37 provides a legal basis for inclusive participation, its promise must be matched by actions that prioritize equitable policies and protect marginalized groups (Gede & Mahayasa, 2023). By centering these voices and fostering a more inclusive framework, the IKN project could become a model for just and inclusive development.

An ecofeminist perspective offers valuable insights into the interconnected challenges of inclusivity, sustainability, and environmental justice within the IKN project. Ecofeminism emphasizes the intrinsic link between social justice and ecological well-being, advocating for governance systems that respect both human and environmental rights (Warren, 2000). From this standpoint, the exclusion of women and indigenous groups from decision-making processes is not merely a social issue but an ecological one, as their knowledge and contributions are vital for sustainable development (Plumwood, 1993). Women in East

Kalimantan, for example, often play crucial roles in managing natural resources, yet their perspectives are rarely incorporated into formal planning frameworks (Buana et al., 2022). Similarly, indigenous ecological wisdom could provide innovative solutions to the challenges of urban development, from biodiversity conservation to sustainable land management (Nugraha et al., 2022).

Realizing the transformative potential of an ecofeminist approach requires systemic changes in governance structures. The current top-down model of decision-making must be replaced with participatory systems that actively involve marginalized groups at every stage of the project. Education and capacity-building initiatives can further empower women and indigenous leaders to take on prominent roles in shaping the project's direction. By embedding these principles into the IKN framework, Indonesia could set a global precedent for development that bridges social and environmental priorities. The IKN project's success hinges on its ability to transcend symbolic gestures and embrace genuine inclusivity, sustainability, and justice.

Nickel Industry Downstreaming

The downstreaming of Indonesia's nickel industry, driven by policies such as the raw nickel export ban and the establishment of smelters, has been framed as a transformative initiative to boost economic growth and enhance the nation's global competitiveness. Central to this strategy is the effort to add value to raw materials domestically, particularly for high-demand industries like electric vehicle (EV) battery production. However, while these policies have generated significant economic opportunities, the inclusivity of the decision-making processes and the degree to which indigenous communities are integrated into this industrial shift remain deeply contested. Despite the promise of increased employment opportunities and advancements in human resource development—partially achieved through international partnerships like Indonesia-China nickel cooperations—marginalized groups in resource-rich regions often face systemic barriers in accessing these benefits (Rosada et al., 2023). These barriers expose a disconnect between national economic ambitions and the lived realities of local communities who are often excluded from critical stages of planning and implementation (Kurniawan et al., 2020).

In regions rich in nickel deposits, such as Southeast Sulawesi and Central Sulawesi, indigenous groups have raised persistent concerns over land use practices and resource allocation. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs associated with nickel mining operations have sought to address some of these challenges by improving community resilience and fostering collective efficacy. In certain cases, these programs have provided limited benefits, such as infrastructure development and access to education. However, meaningful participation by indigenous communities in decision-making processes remains insufficient. While CSR initiatives attempt to mitigate social and environmental impacts, they frequently fail to address the structural exclusion of these groups from key

decisions that directly affect their lives (Rela et al., 2020). Moreover, public engagement in environmental assessments tied to nickel smelter operations has been constrained by inadequate government oversight and poor dissemination of information. Communities often receive limited opportunities to voice their concerns, with consultations reduced to formalities rather than substantive dialogues. This lack of genuine participatory governance exacerbates tensions and leaves affected populations vulnerable to exploitation by corporate interests (Kusumawardhana & Permata, 2023).

The sustainability of Indonesia's downstream nickel industry is another critical dimension of the discussion. Policies such as Ministerial Regulation No. 11 of 2019, which mandate the domestic processing and refining of mineral resources, have spurred the establishment of smelters and associated infrastructure. This regulatory shift has positioned Indonesia as a key player in the global EV battery supply chain, offering the potential for economic diversification and reduced reliance on raw material exports (Setiawan & Horman, 2022). However, these developments are accompanied by significant ecological costs that raise questions about their long-term sustainability. Nickel mining and smelter operations have caused widespread deforestation, water contamination, and biodiversity loss in several affected regions. For instance, in Pomalaa, Southeast Sulawesi, rivers have shown signs of light pollution and contamination linked to mining activities, raising alarm over the long-term environmental degradation of critical

ecosystems (Ilham et al., 2017). These environmental harms creates a pressing need to balance economic growth with ecological preservation, a balance that has proven difficult to achieve (Kurniawan et al., 2020).

Despite progress in adopting renewable energy technologies within the nickel industry, challenges persist in scaling production sustainably. Certain operations have integrated cleaner energy solutions, such as solar and wind power, to reduce their carbon footprint. However, these efforts remain limited in scope and impact, particularly in light of the scale of environmental destruction caused by mining and refining activities (Kusumawardhana & Permata, 2023). As global demand for nickel surges, driven by the rapid expansion of the EV market, the pressure to increase production risks worsening existing ecological challenges. Without robust environmental safeguards and a commitment to sustainable practices, the environmental costs of downstreaming could undermine its economic benefits (Ilham et al., 2017). Achieving true sustainability requires more than technological innovation; it demands comprehensive policy reforms, independent environmental monitoring, and active collaboration with affected communities to ensure the equitable distribution of both the benefits and burdens of industrial development.

The downstreaming of the nickel industry has also intensified environmental injustices, particularly for marginalized communities that disproportionately bear the ecological costs of resource extraction. Land acquisition processes often sideline customary land rights, displacing indigenous

populations and severing their cultural and economic ties to the land. Conflicts over land use and environmental degradation are especially pronounced in Central Sulawesi, where local communities have been forced to resort to protests and, in some cases, communal violence to demand fair compensation for land seizures (Hudayana et al., 2020). These conflicts highlight the broader socio-environmental challenges associated with nickel mining, where the pursuit of national economic goals frequently overrides the rights and well-being of local populations (Kurniawan et al., 2020).

The environmental impact assessment (EIA) processes associated with nickel smelters have been another area of contention. While EIAs are intended to identify and mitigate environmental risks, they are often criticized for failing to address community concerns or implement adequate safeguards. In many cases, the synchronization of monitoring mechanisms is inefficient, leading to gaps in accountability and oversight (Kurniawan et al., 2020). This systemic weakness not only undermines the credibility of the EIA process but also exacerbates environmental harm by allowing industries to operate with minimal checks on their activities (Kusumawardhana & Permata, 2023). Strengthening governance frameworks is essential to address these shortcomings, particularly through the establishment of independent regulatory bodies and mechanisms that prioritize community involvement. Transparent and accountable governance is critical to ensuring that the benefits of downstreaming are equitably distributed and that affected communities are adequately protected from the adverse impacts of industrial activities.

To achieve environmental justice within the nickel industry, the government and corporate stakeholders must address the structural inequities that underlie resource extraction and processing. This involves not only recognizing the rights of indigenous communities but actively involving them in decision-making processes from the outset. Land acquisition practices should adhere to principles of free, prior, and informed consent to ensure that communities have a meaningful say in the decisions that affect their livelihoods and environments (Hudayana et al., 2020). Additionally, mechanisms for fair compensation and alternative livelihood programs must be strengthened to mitigate the socio-economic disruptions caused by displacement and resource exploitation (Rela et al., 2020).

Food Estate

Indonesia's food estate program has been positioned as a cornerstone of the country's strategy to enhance food security and reduce dependence on imports by establishing large-scale agricultural zones. While the program reflects a national ambition to bolster self-sufficiency in staple crops, its implementation has raised serious concerns regarding the inclusivity of its processes and the integration of local and indigenous knowledge. In regions such as Central Kalimantan, where food estate projects have been developed, community engagement has often been reduced to superficial interactions which might include -- informational

meetings, ceremonial events, symbolic discussions, and related meetings with limited transparency – rather than meaningful dialogues. Local populations, including indigenous groups, have reported feeling excluded from decision-making processes, particularly in the planning and execution stages of these initiatives (Marwanto & Pangestu, 2021). Policies governing land acquisition frequently overlook the customary rights of these communities, leading to land use changes that fail to account for cultural and ecological considerations (Hajati, 2022). While the government has introduced measures to increase community participation, such efforts remain inadequate for addressing the deep-seated issues faced by marginalized groups. This disconnect highlights a broader pattern of marginalization that undermines the program's potential to deliver equitable and sustainable outcomes.

A critical gap in the food estate program is its failure to integrate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into agricultural practices. Indigenous communities often possess rich knowledge about local ecosystems, including sustainable methods for managing soil, water, and biodiversity. However, this knowledge is rarely acknowledged in the planning and operational phases of food estate projects. For instance, traditional practices such as rotational farming or mixed-cropping systems, which have been proven to sustain soil health and enhance crop diversity, are often disregarded in favor of monoculture approaches (Achmad & Diniyati, 2021). This exclusion not only marginalizes the cultural practices of indigenous groups

but also limits the potential for these projects to adapt to local environmental conditions effectively. Without meaningful engagement and the inclusion of local expertise, the food estate program risks perpetuating social inequalities while undermining the ecological foundations necessary for its success.

The sustainability of food estate projects has been another contentious issue, particularly in terms of their environmental impact. While these projects aim to secure a stable food supply, their reliance on monoculture farming systems has exposed them to vulnerabilities that threaten their long-term viability. Monocropping, characterized by the cultivation of a single crop species over large areas, increases susceptibility to pest outbreaks and soil degradation, weakening the resilience of these projects to environmental stresses (Achmad & Diniyati, 2021). Over time, these practices can lead to reduced agricultural yields, undermining the very objective of ensuring food security. Moreover, the clearing of peatlands for agricultural use—a common practice in some food estate regions—has resulted in significant carbon emissions, directly contradicting Indonesia's commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and combating climate change (Maskun et al., 2021). This highlights a critical tension within the program: while its stated aim is to ensure sustainable agricultural production, its environmental practices often run counter to sustainability principles.

Adding to these challenges is the uneven development of essential infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, which play a vital role in supporting large-scale agri-

cultural production. Poorly designed or inconsistently implemented irrigation infrastructure has hampered the effectiveness of food estate projects in several regions, limiting their ability to achieve consistent yields and exacerbating environmental stresses on local water systems (Achmad & Diniyati, 2021). Without reliable irrigation, the program risks further degrading soil and water resources, creating long-term ecological and economic vulnerabilities. To address these sustainability challenges, alternative models such as agroforestry have been proposed as more ecologically viable solutions (Rakuasa & Latue, 2023). Agroforestry systems, which integrate trees, crops, and livestock in a synergistic manner, have the potential to enhance land productivity while conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecosystem services. By shifting toward such sustainable alternatives, food estate projects could mitigate their environmental impacts and contribute to more resilient agricultural systems.

Environmental justice is another critical dimension of the food estate program, with marginalized communities bearing a disproportionate share of its socio-environmental costs. Large-scale land acquisitions for food estate projects frequently lead to the dispossession of indigenous populations and smallholder farmers, depriving them of access to ancestral lands and natural resources (Obidzinski et al., 2013). In many cases, these communities rely on the land not only for their livelihoods but also for cultural and spiritual practices, making their displacement particularly damaging. The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MI-FEE) in Papua serves as a stark example of these injustices. This project has been widely criticized for its socio-environmental consequences, including deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and the disruption of traditional livelihoods (Ito et al., 2014). For indigenous groups in Merauke, the clearing of forests for large-scale agricultural production has led to the erosion of their cultural heritage and economic independence, forcing many to seek alternative, often precarious, sources of income.

The displacement caused by food estate projects not only disrupts traditional livelihoods but also exacerbates existing socio-economic inequalities. Smallholder farmers, who often operate on the margins of formal land tenure systems, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of land consolidation and resource extraction. In many cases, compensation for land acquisition is either inadequate or inaccessible, leaving affected communities with little recourse to challenge the loss of their land and livelihoods (Obidzinski et al., 2013). Moreover, the absence of robust mechanisms to address grievances has led to rising tensions and conflicts in food estate regions, further undermining the program's social legitimacy (Ito et al., 2014). Hence, again for the third time in this writing, to address these inequities, the government must adopt policies that prioritize free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) as a cornerstone of land acquisition processes. Ensuring that communities are fully informed and actively involved in decision-making can help mitigate the socio-economic disruptions caused by large-scale agricultural projects.

In addition to FPIC, fair compensation mechanisms are essential to achieving environmental justice within the food estate program. Compensation should not only reflect the economic value of the land but also account for the social and cultural losses experienced by displaced communities. Innovative approaches, such as community-led development programs, can provide displaced populations with opportunities to rebuild their livelihoods while maintaining their cultural identity (Rakuasa & Latue, 2023). Additionally, environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for food estate projects must be strengthened to ensure that they address the concerns of affected communities and implement robust mitigation measures. EIAs should not be treated as procedural requirements but as critical tools for promoting accountability and minimizing environmental harm (Achmad & Diniyati, 2021). By addressing these structural issues, the food estate program can move closer to achieving its goals of enhancing food security while upholding the principles of environmental justice.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight several key aspects of how Indonesia's development initiatives—examined through the previously established ecofeminist framework—reflect persistent challenges related to inclusivity, sustainability, and environmental justice. The data and analysis presented in the previous sections have been systematically mapped according to the methodological framework employed in this study:

Table 1. Conclusion of the results based on the ecofeminist framework

	Ibu Kota Nusantara **(IKN)**	**Nickel Industry Downstreaming**	**Food Estate**	**Ecofeminist Alignment**
Inclusive Participation & Indigenous Integration	Limited engagement of indigenous communities; decision-making often excludes local voices; policies lack meaningful participation mechanisms.	Marginalized groups face systemic barriers; indigenous knowledge and participation are minimally integrated in policy.	Local and indigenous communities are excluded from meaningful participation; TEK largely overlooked in planning.	These findings align with Mies & Shiva's (1993) critique of centralized, top-down development that marginalizes local, subsistence-based communities and dismisses indigenous knowledge systems. They also resonate with Warren's (2000) emphasis on participatory ethics and the moral obligation to include diverse, especially marginalized, voices in environmental governance.

Sustainability	Ambitious green city initiatives overshadowed by deforestation and habitat destruction; weak alignment with ecological preservation.	Economic benefits of downstreaming offset by significant environmental damage, including water pollution and deforestation.	Monoculture farming practices increase vulnerability; peatland clearing raises carbon emissions, threatening ecological goals.	These outcomes are in line with Plumwood's (19930 critique of anthropocentric and dualistic thinking that separates humans from nature and justifies exploitative development. Their framework calls for an ecological rationality that is clearly lacking in projects that pursue economic growth at the expense of environmental balance.
Environmental Justice	Indigenous populations face displacement and cultural erosion; benefits unequally distributed among stakeholders.	Displacement of communities; weak compensation mechanisms exacerbate socio-environmental inequalities.	Large-scale land acquisitions dispossess indigenous groups and disrupt traditional livelihoods, deepening inequality.	This reflects Warren's (2000) concern with intersecting systems of oppression that marginalize women and indigenous communities, and the need for an ethics of care in environmental policy. It also draws from Mies & Shiva's (1993) emphasis on how environmental harms disproportionately affect marginalized communities, and Plumwood's (1993) critique of hierarchical systems that perpetuate injustice.

The findings of this study reveal critical shortcomings in Indonesia's key development initiatives—*Ibu Kota Nusantara* (IKN), *Nickel Downstreaming*, and *Food Estate Projects*—when assessed through an ecofeminist framework. Across all three cases, issues of inclusivity, sustainability, and environmental justice remain persistent and interconnected challenges. The exclusion of marginalized groups, particularly indigenous communities, is a recurrent theme. Decision-making processes often lack meaningful engagement with local populations and fail to integrate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), which could offer innovative solutions to sustainability and equity challenges. This systemic marginalization not only undermines the legitimacy of these projects but also limits their ability to achieve inclusive and effective outcomes.

Sustainability is another critical dimension where these initiatives fall

short. While IKN is envisioned as a green and sustainable city, its environmental footprint, marked by deforestation and habitat destruction, contradicts its ecological aspirations. Similarly, nickel downstreaming's economic gains are offset by significant environmental costs, including water pollution and biodiversity loss. The food estate program, intended to secure food self-sufficiency, faces similar criticisms for its reliance on monoculture farming and the clearing of peatlands, which contribute to carbon emissions and soil degradation. These findings highlight a critical tension between economic development priorities and the need for long-term ecological preservation, emphasizing the necessity of integrating sustainability into the core of planning and implementation.

Environmental justice emerges as another key issue across all three projects. The socio-environmental costs of these initiatives are disproportionately borne by marginalized communities, including indigenous populations and smallholder farmers, who face displacement, loss of livelihoods, and cultural erosion. Weak compensation mechanisms and limited recourse for grievances exacerbate these inequities, further deepening social divisions and eroding trust in governance. These outcomes challenge the ethical foundation of these projects and underscore the urgent need for policies that ensure equitable distribution of benefits while addressing the structural injustices inherent in large-scale development.

The findings suggest that Indonesia's development strategies require a fundamental shift toward participatory governance, sustainable practices, and environmental justice. By integrating the voices of marginalized groups, prioritizing ecological resilience, and ensuring fair compensation and resource access, these initiatives could move closer to their stated goals of equity and sustainability. Future research should explore inclusive governance models, the viability of sustainable alternatives such as agroforestry and renewable energy, and the development of comprehensive impact assessments that consider both socio-economic and ecological dimensions. Such efforts could provide valuable insights to inform policy reforms that align Indonesia's development agenda with principles of equity, sustainability, and justice.

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Beyond Hegemony: How KNB Scholarship Program Redefines

Indonesia's Soft Power and Global South Knowledge Production

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The Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship Program, launched by the government of the Republic of Indonesia, represents a transformative approach to educational exchange that challenges traditional North-South paradigms. This study adopts several frameworks to comprehensively analyze how the KNB Scholarship Program fosters South-South Cooperation (SSC), disrupts Western-centric knowledge hierarchies, and contributes to capacity building in the Global South. Through a qualitative methodology, the research involves a comprehensive document review of official reports, policy papers, tracer studies, and university evaluations related to the scholarship program, as well as written and oral interviews from the current scholars and alumni and articles, theses, dissertations produced by KNB scholarship recipients. The findings highlight the KNB Scholarship's role in redefining Indonesia's soft power and reshaping Global South knowledge production. It serves not only as a means of individual empowerment but also as a catalyst for systemic change, which drives a transformation in the global educational and diplomatic landscape. In line with the Bandung Conference's spirit of solidarity and self-determination, the KNB Scholarship Program advances Indonesia's role in shaping a more inclusive and equitable global governance framework, offering valuable insights into the future of educational diplomacy and global power dynamics. By prioritizing Global South solidarity, equitable and sustainable development, and the decolonization of knowledge, the KNB Scholarship Program powerfully advances Indonesia's soft power and governance leadership in SSC and directly challenges the dominance of Western academic and political paradigms in a comprehensive approach that can be called "KNB Diplomacy."

Keywords: *Global South Knowledge Production; Indonesian Soft Power; Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship Program; South-South Cooperation (SSC); Western-centric Knowledge Hierarchies*

Introduction

Indonesia's Soft Power and Educational Diplomacy

The term "soft power," as coined by Nye (2004), describes the ability of a country to influence others through cultural appeal, values, and diplomacy, rather than resorting to hard power tactics – coercion or military might. In the context of global politics, it has become a crucial tool for states seeking to enhance their international standing that emphasizes attraction, persuasion, and the promotion of values, such as democracy, human rights, and education. It is particularly

significant in an increasingly multipolar world, where countries are vying for influence in a landscape that is no longer dominated solely by Western powers. In this context, soft power enables emerging powers to project influence, foster cooperation, and build sustainable relationships across the globe. In turn, Indonesia has historically leveraged its diplomatic principles of solidarity and mutual respect as key pillars of its soft power strategy to shape its international influence. Looking back at history, the Asian-African Conference, otherwise known as the Bandung Conference, held in 1955, is a key historical event in the context of Indonesia's approach to International Relations (IR). Initiated by Indonesia's then Prime Minister, Dr. Ali Sastroamidjojo (Rao, 1955; Wang, 1955), the conference, attended by newly independent countries from Asia and Africa, was a seminal moment for the Global South, thereby emphasizing the Bandung Spirit[1] that continues to influence Indonesia's foreign policy today, especially in its efforts to promote South-South Cooperation (SSC), which, as Adjani (2023) points out, functions as a diplomatic tool aligned with national interests and determines the form of cooperation—bilateral, regional, or multilateral of the Republic of Indonesia.

In today's SSC landscape, practitioners pursue goals like expanding global influence, promoting values, accessing markets and resources, and building anti-hegemonic alliances—often with overlapping motivations. Three key approaches have emerged in the Global South: challenging traditional donor-recipient models, strengthening SSC while engaging selectively with traditional donors, and aligning closely with established donor frameworks (Zavarce Velasquez, 2024). Indonesia largely adopts the second approach—deepening SSC through educational initiatives while maintaining pragmatic cooperation with traditional partners. Indonesia's foreign policy goals include supporting decolonization efforts, advancing global social justice, and nurturing international unity grounded in the principles of *Pancasila*[2]. As Southeast Asia's largest economy, Indonesia plays a pivotal regional role and, guided by *bebas-aktif*[3], the country assert itself in global politics rather than adopt a passive stance, as Wicaksana (2023) explains. Its strategic Indo-Pacific position and rising political-economic clout enable it to champion the Global South. Indonesia actively expands its global influence by integrating various forms of diplomacy into its soft power strategy—inter alia, cultural, sports, trade, religious, digital, environmental, water and maritime, and coffee diplomacy. These approaches foster stronger international ties through cultural draw.

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[1] principles of mutual respect, non-interference, and the promotion of development through solidarity.

[2] Pancasila is the foundational philosophical theory of the Indonesian state, consisting of five principles: belief in one God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives, and social justice for all Indonesian people.

[3] The principle of *bebas-aktif* (independent and active) has been the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy since the early years of independence. See Rizal Sukma, "Indonesia's *Bebas-Aktif* Foreign Policy and the 'Security Agreement' with Australia," Australian Journal of International Affairs 51, no. 2 (1997): 231–241, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357719708445212.

Ruderman (2023) asserts that Indonesia's embodiment of its foundational principles within its national ethos—recognized by influential actors in the international system—along with its growing engagement in regional and global affairs, underlines its ambition to shape global governance (Friends of Europe & The Mission of Indonesia to the EU, 2013; Trotier, 2021; Susilo & Prana, 2023). This aspiration is further supported by its strategic use of public diplomacy, particularly in navigating the dual challenge of integrating democracy and Islam into foreign policy, while promoting equitable development through instruments such as educational diplomacy (Sukma, 2011).

Educational diplomacy, defined as the use of academic exchange programs as diplomatic and foreign policy tools, enhances a nation's influence by fostering relationships, projecting knowledge, cultural capital, and values, and promoting mutual understanding (Lindsay, 1989; Nye, 2004; Lima, 2007; Gilboa, 2008; Peterson, 2014; Amirbek & Ydyrys, 2014; Waithaka, 2016; Vaxevanidou, 2018; Khan et al., 2020; Damus, 2021). In the Global South, educational diplomacy has become a crucial means for developing countries to strengthen their global position and foster solidarity among themselves. One of the most significant manifestations of this trend is the sharp rise in the number of international students pursuing higher education worldwide. Since UNESCO began recording data in 1998, the number of international students has more than tripled, reaching 6.4 million by 2020 (British Council, 2024). This surge has been fueled by the increasing globalization of the economy, expanded financial aid opportunities, and active promotion of international education by both sending and host countries, emerging education as a powerful tool for advancing diplomatic and geopolitical interests. Indonesia's commitment to educational diplomacy has its roots in the post-independence period, particularly after the Bandung Conference. This strategy has evolved alongside its foreign policy, with an emphasis on fostering regional solidarity, promoting development, and challenging global inequalities. Unlike traditional North-South educational exchange programs, which often perpetuate unequal power dynamics, South-South educational diplomacy stresses mutual respect, shared learning, and collaborative growth. Hence, over the years, Indonesia has used education, such as through the DARMASISWA Program and the *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* (KNB) Scholarship Program, as a platform to enhance its influence.

The Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship Program in Context

The KNB Scholarship Program represents, undeniably, a strategic initiative of Indonesia, aimed at providing financial assistance to students from the Global South, thus allowing pursuit of bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees at prestigious Indonesian universities.

Table 1. KNB Scholarship Duration

Program	Duration
Indonesian Language Course (BIPA) Program	Maximum of 12 months (2 semesters)
Doctorate Degree Program	Maximum of 48 months (8 semesters)
Master's DegreeProgram	Maximum of 24 months (4 semesters)
Bachelor's Degree Program	Maximum of 48 months (8 semesters)

Source: (Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Republic of Indonesia [DGHE-RT, MoEC-RT, RI], 2021, p. 8).

Initially, the program, formerly called as Gerakan Non-Blok (GNB) Scholarship Program, was conceived during the 10th Conference of Heads of State of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in September 1992. As a result, it was first introduced in 1993, specifically targeting students from NAM member countries. However, over time, the scholarship's scope has evolved, responding to a growing global demand. Notably, in 2002, the regional exclusivity of the program was lifted, marking a significant shift toward inclusivity. In 2006, the scholarship was thereafter renamed as *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* (KNB) Scholarship Program, thus broadening its reach to students across Asia, the Pacific, South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe (DGHE-RT, MoEC-RT, RI, 2021).

Targeting the Global South: The Rationale of the Strategic Vision of KNB

Figure 1. KNB Scholarship Awardees by Countries in 2021
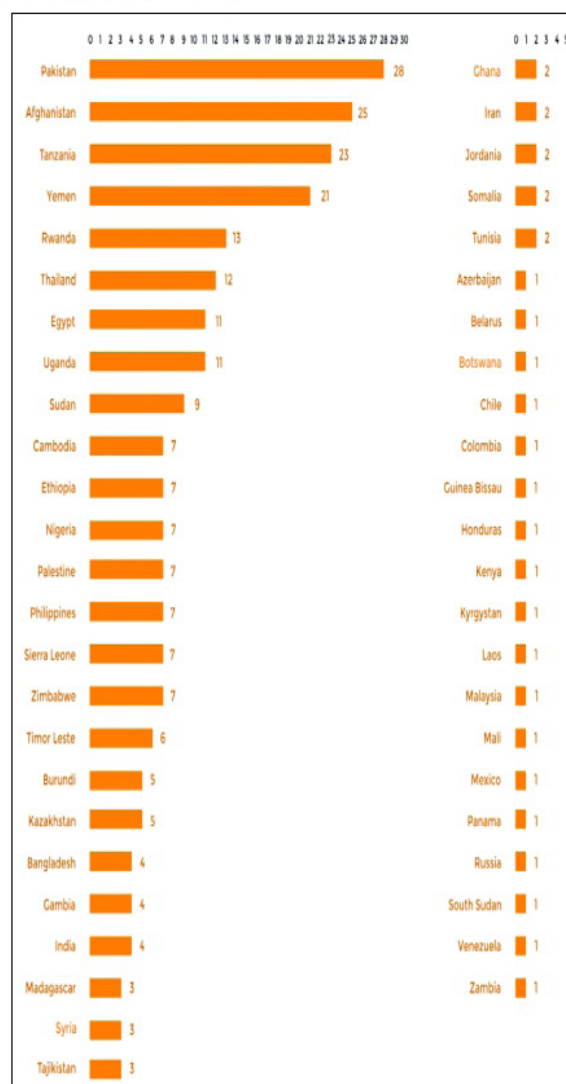
*Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p. 3).*

The growth of the global student population between 2008 and 2018 underscores regional disparities, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where rising demand for education is met with structural challenges like inadequate funding and limited institutional capacity.

Table 2. Student Population Evolution in (2008-2018) per World Region

	2008	2018	Change
World	164 921 995	225 070 099	36%
Europe	33 661 519	28 971 740	-14%
Latin America and the Carribean	20 415 867	28 285 435	39%
Northern America	19 694 365	20 565 372	4%
Africa	10 072 854	15 073 427	50%
Oceania	1 857 648	1 978 565	7%
Asia	79 219 742	130 195 560	64%

Source: (Top International Managers in Engineering [T.I.M.E.] Association, 2021, p. 4)

Research from the EdQual program, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and conducted from 2005 to 2011, highlights the need for targeted interventions to improve education in disadvantaged regions. Studies in Rwanda, Tanzania, Ghana, South Africa, and Pakistan found that structural barriers—socioeconomic inequalities, linguistic challenges, and inadequate teacher training—limit learning opportunities in the Global South (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

Figure 2. Population aged 20-24 by World Region
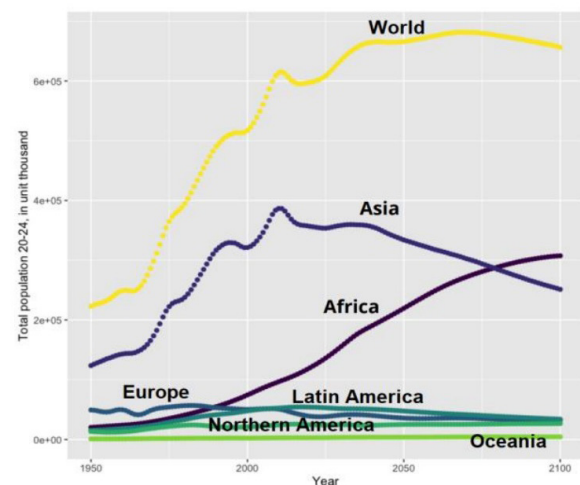
Source: (Top International Managers in Engineering [T.I.M.E.] Association, 2021, p. 2)

While poverty remains a major obstacle, improvements in infrastructure and pedagogy can enhance learning outcomes. Similarly, scholarship programs help bridge educational disparities by providing financial aid and expanding access to quality education for marginalized. Aligned with SDG target 4.b, the KNB Scholarship Program addresses persistent educational disparities in the Global South—where systemic inequalities, limited resources, and inadequate infrastructure hinder access to quality education (UNESCO, 2024)—by prioritizing students from developing countries and expanding their access to quality higher education in Indonesia.

Research Objectives and Scope

While existing literature on educational diplomacy often focuses on North-South exchanges and the associated power imbalances, research on the potential

of SSC to reshape international education and redefine soft power dynamics remains limited (Heryadi et al., 2024). This article addresses that gap by using the KNB Scholarship Program as a case study in educational diplomacy and global equity, building on and expanding the work of Brilyanti (2021). This article examines the KNB Scholarship Program as a case study in the redefinition of Indonesia's soft power and the decolonization of educational exchange. This study investigates how the program functions as a tool of Indonesia's soft power, influencing its foreign policy and strengthening its diplomatic relations with other Global South countries. It also explores how it reshapes global knowledge production by challenging traditional power structures in international education, promoting SSC, empowering scholars from developing countries, and encouraging the exchange of knowledge that challenges Western-centric paradigms. By examining its role in challenging power dynamics, this study contributes to discussions on the future of IR, global governance, and education and the potential for more inclusive models of knowledge production and academic exchange, particularly in the Global South. This article addresses the following research questions:

- *How does the KNB Scholarship Program redefine Indonesia's soft power through educational diplomacy?*

- *How does the KNB Scholarship Program redefine Global South knowledge production?*

The objectives of this study are two-fold:

- To analyze how the KNB Scholarship Program functions as a tool of Indonesia's soft power and its impact on Indonesia's national image and ties with other Global South countries.

- To examine how the KNB Scholarship Program contributes to the decolonization of knowledge production and promotion of SSC in educational exchange, and evaluate its effectiveness in challenging Western-centric paradigms in international education while fostering the academic and professional development of Global South scholars.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study employs constructivism, dependency theory, Global South theory, postcolonial theory, and decolonial theory to examine how scholarship programs initiated by Global South nations reconfigure soft power dynamics and global knowledge production. These programs challenge Western epistemological dominance while fostering horizontal exchanges among developing countries (Wendt, 1992; dos Santos, 1970; Said, 1978; Chen, 2010).

Constructivism and Collaboration

Constructivism emphasizes the socially constructed nature of norms, identities, and institutions in global affairs (Wendt, 1992). When applied to educational diplomacy, this perspective reveals how

Southern-led initiatives cultivate alternative networks of academic exchange that diverge from traditional North-South models. Such programs institutionalize norms of mutual learning and shared development priorities, reflecting Knight's (2014) observation that academic mobility strengthens IR through collaborative engagement. The emphasis on SSC aligns with Stoeckel's (2016) findings on inter-group interactions fostering collective identity, while Zavarce Velasquez (2024) notes how such solidarity challenges Northern hegemony in global governance.

Kant's view of immature cultures, characterized by a lazy and cowardly ethos, offers a deeply troubling lens through which to view the Global South. For him, cultures outside of Europe were not just inferior but culpably immature (Kant, 1784). However, through the lens of constructivism, this perspective must critically be examined—should a certain tribe in Africa, an indigenous person in Mexico, or a Southeast Asian in their own context be viewed as culpably immature merely because they existed outside the Western narrative of progress? The experiences of the Global South, shaped by centuries of colonialism, political upheaval, and socio-cultural transformations, challenge the idea that they are inherently "underdeveloped" or "backward." Indeed, their complexity defies the simplistic categorizations of Western thought (Bello, 2019). Hegel, in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, presents world history as the self-realization of God, a theodicy of reason and liberty *(Freiheit)*, and a process of Enlightenment *(Aufklärung)* that unfolds primarily through Europe (Hegel, 1955; Hegel, 1975; Bernal, 1991). From a constructivist perspective, this framework exhibits a socially constructed narrative of progress that positions Europe as the pinnacle of reason and enlightenment, while relegating the Global South to the margins. Hegel's Eurocentric lens fails to recognize the intricate histories of Southeast Asia, which were not "immature" or "underdeveloped," but shaped by unique and sophisticated systems of knowledge, governance, and culture. The Malay Sultanates, the Khmer Empire, and the kingdom of Srivijaya, for instance, were well-established civilizations long before Western colonialism attempted to impose its own standards of "civilization."

Constructivism urges us to question the historical narratives that have been socially constructed to elevate the West while diminishing the value of non-Western experiences. It challenges us to reconsider development not as a linear, Eurocentric march towards a singular, Western-defined notion of progress, but as a complex, multifaceted process shaped by diverse cultures, histories, and epistemologies.

Dependency Theory and Structural Inequality

Dependency Theory locates the Global South's underdevelopment in historical exploitation and asymmetrical global economic structures (dos Santos, 1970; Frank, 1966). This framework rejects Modernization Theory's linear development paradigm (Rostow, 1960; Lerner, 1958; Inkeles & Smith, 1974), demonstrating

how traditional Northern-led scholarship programs reinforce dependency through unidirectional knowledge transfer (Freire, 1970, p. 84; Naidoo, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2013; Chong et al., 2020). Casellato's (2023) study reveals a strong dominance of authors from the Global North—especially the US, Canada, and Europe—who make up the majority of assigned readings. In contrast, Southern-led initiatives disrupt this dynamic by enabling scholars to apply contextually relevant expertise to local challenges, thereby countering intellectual dependency (Prebisch, 1950; Adebisi, 2020; Oztig, 2022). Wallerstein's (1974) World Systems Theory further illuminates how these programs address core-periphery asymmetries in global higher education (Altbach, 2016), particularly in under-resourced regions like South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Dormeier Freire, 2023).

Global South Theory and Knowledge Decolonization

Global South theory advocates for the substantive inclusion of Southern perspectives in reshaping global knowledge systems (Suwanbubbha, 2005; Chen, 2010). The imposition of Western-centric models of education, development, and governance has often led to policies that are disconnected from the cultural and socio-economic realities of developing countries, affirming the point of Fanon (1952;2008) in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* that the psychological effects of colonialism and the European worldview indeed shaped colonized identities. Educational programs grounded in this

paradigm operationalize Escobar's (1995) critique of universalist development models by promoting epistemic autonomy (Raz, 1988; Demeter, 2020; Matheson, 2024), the right of societies to produce knowledge reflective of their contextual realities. These initiatives reclaim Foucault's (1980, p. 84) "subjugated knowledges" through integrating indigenous and scientific frameworks, challenging what Mignolo (1995) and Dussel (1995) identified as Western epistemic imperialism. The theoretical works of de Sousa Santos (2014) and Dados and Connell (2012) provide critical foundations for this decolonial approach, while Sen's (1999) capability framework highlights how such programs expand developmental possibilities beyond economic metrics. Regionally, these initiatives foster the educational diplomacy that Buzan et al. (1998) identify as crucial for SSC, particularly in addressing shared challenges like climate change and sustainable development (Khudori, 2006; Lai & Kan, 2020). It is clear that knowledge cannot be simply reduced to power; rather, it is inextricably linked to power dynamics that shape its creation, validation, and dissemination (Foucault, 1980; Alcoff, 1996). It is beyond dispute that traditional epistemologies have often ignored the extent to which power influences not only the application and discovery of knowledge but also its justification and the determination of what is accepted as "truth" (Alcoff, 2007).

Central to this effort is the concept of "decolonization of knowledge" against Eurocentrism (Amin, 1989) and Orientalism (Said, 1978), which, as argued

by postcolonial theorists like Spivak (1988), involves not only a rejection of Western epistemological paradigms but also a reclamation and revitalization of indigenous knowledge systems. In the case of Southeast Asia, knowledge systems and development models need to be understood not through the lens of Western superiority, but in their own terms—terms that recognize local histories, cultural practices, and indigenous knowledge. By reframing the broader Global South, not as spaces of deficiency, but as areas of dynamic cultural production and knowledge, the world can begin to dismantle the colonial and neocolonial structures that continue to define what counts as "progress" or "civilization." In doing so, there will be an opening up of the possibility for more inclusive and equitable models of development that honor the complexity and richness of the Global South, including but not limited to educational exchange and knowledge production.

Postcolonial Theory and Epistemic Resistance

Colonialism reinforced power dynamics, positioning Western knowledge as the universal norm and sidelining the Global South (Alcoff, 2007; Tesfaye, 2024). This Eurocentric lens erased colonial history and falsely portrayed the Global South as "backward." As Olaniyan (2013) argues, African poverty stems from European exploitation, while de Sousa Santos et al. (2007) assert that colonization imposed Western epistemologies, delegitimizing indigenous knowledge and relegating it to a subordinate role.

Postcolonial theory critiques the enduring coloniality of knowledge production systems (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988), where Western epistemologies systematically marginalize alternative knowledge traditions (Alatas, 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Chambati, 2013). This marginalization operates through what Kailo (2005, pp. 75-76) terms the "master imaginary"—a hierarchical framework that naturalizes Western epistemic dominance. Southern-led educational initiatives embody de Sousa Santos' (2014) concept of "epistemic solidarity" by centering indigenous perspectives, yet remain constrained by broader structures of epistemic violence (Grosfoguel, 2012). Postcolonial theory advocates for an epistemological shift, urging the Global South to assert its intellectual autonomy and challenge Western knowledge monopolies (Hall & Tandon, 2017). The limitations of current diversity initiatives as "thin inclusion" (Stein, 2017) and "soft reform" (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015) underscore the need for more radical epistemological restructuring beyond mere representation.

Decolonial Theory and Epistemic Justice

Decolonial Theory is a critical framework that seeks to understand and dismantle the ongoing legacies of colonialism in contemporary systems of knowledge, power, culture, and society (Quijano, 2000). Rooted in the experiences and intellectual traditions of the Global South, it challenges the dominance of Western worldviews and aims to re-center marginalized epistemologies, identities, and ways of being.

Historically, the Global South's intellectual contributions have been seen as inferior or derivative, influencing global policies, education, and IR. Education plays a crucial role in this decolonization, as seen in Michel Foucault's concept of epistemic power, which frames knowledge as a tool of control (Foucault, 1980). As Ntsobi (2024) argues, decolonizing education requires significant shifts in both structure and underlying philosophy. Since societies increasingly rely on knowledge as a catalyst for progress (Ndlovu & Woldegiorgis, 2024), shifting knowledge creation from the West to traditionally excluded regions is key to this process.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology to analyze the KNB Scholarship Program, focusing on its role in redefining Indonesia's soft power vis-à-vis educational diplomacy and reshaping global knowledge production. The research primarily involves a document review and thematic content analysis of sources such as official reports, policy documents, evaluations from Indonesian higher education institutions (HEIs), Indonesian government, especially the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT), interviews with KNB scholarship recipients, and articles, theses, and dissertations produced by KNB alumni, published in respected scholarly outlets. The document review will assess the program's objectives and alignment with Indonesia's diplomatic strategies, while the content analysis of interviews and

KNB scholars' academic writings will explore themes like decolonization, SSC, and the promotion of indigenous epistemologies and Global South knowledge production. Data will be drawn from primary and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact.

Findings and Analysis

The KNB Scholarship serves as a platform where ideas on education, development, and international cooperation are redefined, particularly within the Global South. As Indonesia is not yet a popular destination for students mobility (Abduh et al., 2018; Fajarwati & Suyanto, 2019), it is working on it to increasingly attract international students seeking global academic experiences in Indonesian HEIs (Hamamah & Hapsari, 2021; Yunanto & Tricahyono, 2025). This trend, as Simek and Stewart (2024) emphasize based on the Push-Pull Model proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), aligns with the idea that a nation's strong reputation within the global system plays a crucial role in students' choices of study destinations, as proposed by the World Systems Theory (Wallerstein, 1974) and supported by Sandra (2020). Hapsari and Hamamah (2019) observed that international students adapted quickly to university life in Indonesia, attributing their smooth transition to the institution's well-developed infrastructure, supportive academic environment, and the welcoming nature of faculty and peers. Their satisfaction with their academic journey echoes Indonesia's broader efforts to create an inclusive and

globally competitive educational landscape.

On the other hand, the increasing presence of international students has significantly influenced Indonesian HEIs. The internationalization of these institutions has driven them to enhance their academic offerings, research collaborations, and global engagement (Byun et al., 2011; He & Chiang, 2016). This is integral to Indonesia's foreign policy, aligning with its commitment to regional leadership in Southeast Asia and advocacy for the Global South. As Dr. Rizal Sukma (1995) noted, Indonesia has transitioned from a "low-profile" to an "active foreign policy," based on principles of engagement, mutual respect, and peace. By participating in multilateral forums like the G20 and ASEAN, Indonesia amplifies its global influence and advocates for the inclusion of developing nations in global governance, addressing issues like economic cooperation, political stability, and sustainable development (ASEAN Studies Center, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2024). This study reveals the KNB Scholarship Program's multifaceted role in redefining Indonesia's soft power, fostering SSC, and contributing to the decolonization of knowledge production in the Global South. The findings, incorporating data from the program's official reports and policy documents and KNB scholars' testimonies, stories, and case studies, are discussed in detail below:
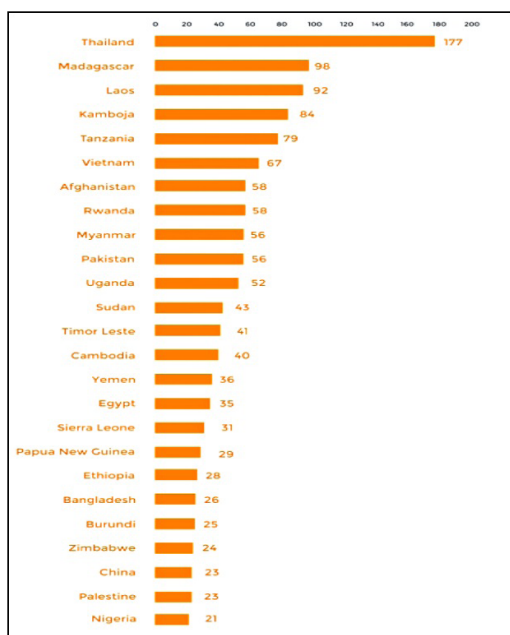
Redefining Indonesia's Soft Power

Figure 3. The KNB Scholarship Program as a Mechanism of Indonesia's Soft Power
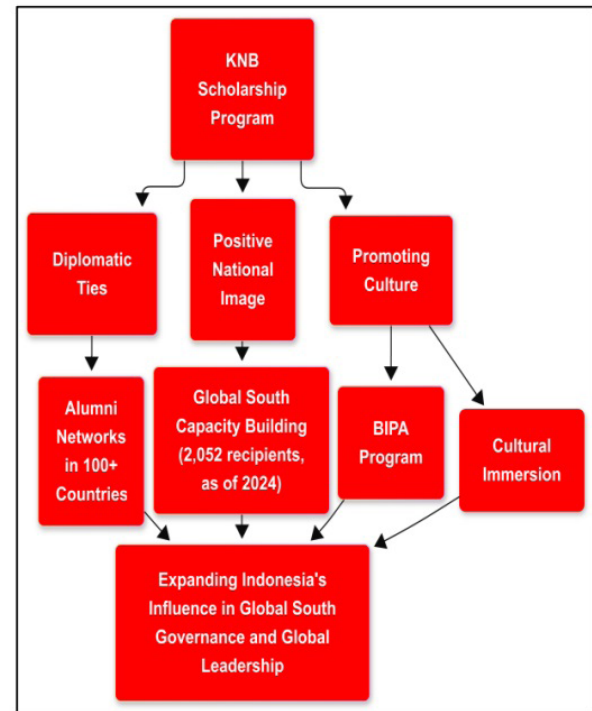
The KNB Scholarship Program enhances Indonesia's soft power in several ways. Firstly, it strengthens diplomatic ties with participating Global South countries.

Figure 4. Distribution of KNB Awardees by Country, by 2021 (Top 25 Countries)

Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p. 7).

Figure 5. Distribution of KNB Awardees by Country, by 2021 (Other Countries)

Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p. 7).

By offering educational opportunities, Indonesia builds goodwill and mutual understanding, translating into increased influence and cooperation. The alumni network created through the KNB program serves as a valuable resource for strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations. As expressed by a KNB alumni named Alith Jacob Majok Ayuen from South Sudan, a Master of Science in Economic Science graduate from Universitas Brawijaya (UB), the KNB program fosters a unique opportunity where *"I can advocate [for] and personally take part in the bilateral and people-to-people relations between Indonesia and South Sudan. Economically, I can see myself open [opening] up investment opportunities for Indonesian [Indonesians] in South Sudan. Last but not [the] least, I will strongly advocate for Indonesian higher education to my fellow South Sudan citizens [South Sudanese citizens] and other international students seeking academic opportunities."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.48)

Secondly, the program projects a positive image of Indonesia. The data unwrapped that the KNB Scholarship, thus, allows Indonesia to assert itself as a leading voice in the global discourse on education, development, and SSC. It showcases Indonesia's commitment to human capital development and capacity building in the Global South. This enhances Indonesia's image as a responsible and influential global player. The program's emphasis on mutual respect and equitable partnership resonates positively with other developing countries.

Awaludin (2024), citing an interview with Ms. Putri Nailatul Himma, the Head

of the Institutional Strengthening Working Group of the Directorate of Institutional Development of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, notes:

> *This also helps our universities improve cooperation, in other words, to enhance the reputation of Indonesian universities internationally, particularly in the field of education.* **(translated to English from Indonesian by the author)**

Through the program, many Indonesian HEIs have adopted English-medium instruction (EMI) and expanded international-standard offerings, while also integrating programs that celebrate local cultures, values, and knowledge systems. This dual approach enhances Indonesia's image as globally engaged yet culturally rooted. The presence of KNB scholars fosters cross-cultural understanding, positioning Indonesian HEIs as inclusive and globally connected. Importantly, this shift reflects a commitment to autonomous intellectual development, enabling Global South nations like Indonesia to shape educational trajectories aligned with their own histories, cultures, and aspirations.

Thirdly, the scholarship actively promotes Indonesia's language, culture, music, arts, and tourism. Through cultural immersion, educational opportunities, and academic collaboration, the program positions Indonesia as a key player in shaping regional discourse and advancing development initiatives.

Upon arrival, KNB scholars are formally welcomed at the annual KNB International Students Summit (ISS)—a combined orientation and celebration featuring games, competitions, interactive sessions, and cultural performances, which fosters intercultural exchange and peer connection and presents Indonesia as a hospitable, dynamic, and collaborative educational hub.

Figure 6. Filipino KNB Scholars Enjoying Balap Kelereng4 during KNB International Students Summit (ISS) 2022

Note: Photo used with permission.

Accordingly, the KNB program actively promotes Indonesia's rich cultural and artistic heritage, including its language, music, and tourism. Several host universities organize cultural excursions and heritage visits as part of their academic calendar. For instance, Universitas Negeri Malang (UM) conducts annual study tours for KNB scholars, taking them to iconic destinations such as Bali and Banyuwangi.

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[4] *Balap kelereng* is a traditional Indonesian marble race where participants balance a marble on a spoon—often held in the mouth—and race to the finish line. It is commonly played during national celebrations and local festivals.

Figure 7. UM KNB Scholars Study Excursion

Note: Photo Courtesy of Office of International Affairs, Universitas Negeri Malang.

Figure 8. KNB Scholars Immersed in Balinese Culture during a Study Excursion in Bali

Note: From Left to Right: KNB scholars from Tanzania, Philippines, Timor-Leste, and Madagascar, photo used with permission.

Another occasion is the excursion study organized by Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU), where five KNB scholars from Bangladesh, Botswana, Pakistan, Tanzania, and Yemen visited SMPN 2 Kabanjahe in North Sumatra in January 2025. Through presentations and discussions with local students, this activity provided a real-world setting to practice their Indonesian language skills and foster intercultural exchange.

Figure 9. USU KNB Scholars Study Excursion

Note: Photo Courtesy of the Directorate of Internationalization and Digital System, Universitas Sumatera Utara (Harahap, 2025).

During these visits, KNB students express deep admiration for Indonesia's natural beauty, cultural richness, and tourist attractions. Many document and share their experiences through social media and personal networks, effectively becoming informal cultural ambassadors. Their positive portrayal of Indonesia online enhances the country's image and contributes to cultural and eco-tourism promotion.

Indonesia also enhances its soft power by embedding its national language into the academic and professional trajectories of

international students. A notable example is the *Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* (BIPA) program, a mandatory preparatory course for KNB scholars.

This language program introduces them to the Indonesian language and cultural nuances that lay the foundation for deeper academic engagement and social integration (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020; Wirawan & Nakti, 2023). They engage in ways that go beyond functional communication, which integrates Indonesian language into scholarly discussions. Aguskin and Maryani (2018) found that these students develop a strong Willingness to Communicate (WTC), enabling them to navigate academic and social environments with greater confidence. Based on the data analyzed, it is evident that scholars adopt the Indonesian language in their academic work and professional networks. Correspondingly, the KNB scholarship program extends its influence beyond traditional diplomacy—cultivating long-term affinities and shaping future leaders who carry a lived understanding of Indonesia's values and perspectives.

Table 3. Testimonies of KNB Scholarship Program Recipients Regarding BIPA Program

Names of Recipients and Country of Origin	Degree Program and University	Testimonies
Meaza Haddis Gebeyehu, Ethiopia	Master in Laws in International Trade Law Universitas Indonesia (UI)	*"My journey in Indonesia started with the BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) program at the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia (UI). This program had a significant role in introducing me to Indonesian culture and livelihood."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.23)
Hend Farouk, Egypt	Master of Arts in Linguistics Studies, University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS)	*"In the first year, I took an Indonesian language course and completed it with satisfactory results."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.31)
Uchenna Collins Agbarakwe, Nigeria	Master of Science in Management, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan (UNPAR)	*"Studying in Indonesia through the KNB scholarship program has truly impacted my life positively…So coming to Indonesia was a new adventure and phase…The BIPA program made me more determined to succeed in Indonesia. I became more independent and trusted my abilities to learn, I started trying to interact more with the locals. I used to stay at the university dormitory but then moved into a Kos-kosan or lodging house which helped me become more independent and interact more intensively with locals."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.37-38)
Thipphongphat Manivong, Laos	Master of Education in Sports Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)	*"Before receiving the KNB scholarship, I received an Art and Culture scholarship from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and stayed in Surabaya for 3 months. Since then, I gained my interest in Indonesian culture, especially Indonesian martial arts: Pencak Silat and Tarung Derajat. After completing my education in 2017, I returned to Laos and worked at Sport Science Centre under the auspices of the Laos Ministry of Defense and is responsible for three sports: Secretary General of Lao National Pencak Silat and Shorinji Kempo, and Deputy Secretary General of Lao National Volleyball Federation… I like many things about Indonesia, particularly the language and cuisine. I also learned a lot from my lecturers and friends in Indonesia on how to maintain good social relations and engage in fun activities, such as hiking, traveling, learning Madura dance, singing Surabaya song Rek Ayo Rek, playing traditional Gamelan and Angklung. I used to perform Indonesian music and dance for Indonesia National Chanel at Yogyakarta University Hall."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.41)
Alith Jacob Majok Ayuen, South Sudan	Master of Science in Economic Science, Universitas Brawijaya (UB)	*"I experience firsthand Indonesian cuisine, like the delicious Ayam Goreng and Nasi Goreng, which I had never tasted before. I also get to explore the beautiful scenery of Indonesia. In addition, I was surprised to find that Indonesia is not only diverse, but also cosmopolitan. Not only have I met and made friends with Indonesians, who are themselves diverse ethnically and religiously."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.47)
Khamsone Lorxaypao, Lao PDR	Master of Education in Mathematics Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY)	*"The first course I took during the program was an Indonesian language course. I started learning the Indonesian alphabet, grammar, peer-to-peer conversations with teachers, taking Indonesian listening classes and practicing with my classmates on campus, as well as going on to gather information elsewhere… In addition, I have also learned about the beautiful culture of Indonesia. I studied at the museum on campus and practiced making handicrafts that are unique to Indonesia and have special characteristics of Yogyakarta. Moreover, I also learned and practiced traditional dance."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.56)

Table 4. Selected Testimonies of KNB Scholars Regarding Studying in Indonesia

Names of Recipients and Country of Origin	Degree Program and University	Testimony
Otaigo Elisha, Tanzania	Master of Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Economics, Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) University	*"I would like to share my experience on how studying in Indonesia, supported by KNB Scholarship, has inspired me to establish NovFeed, a non-for-profit organization concerned with food security and sustainable fish farming, located in Dar Es Salam, Tanzania. I must admit from the outset that my study in Indonesia has significantly contributed to my passion and desire to pursue innovative solutions for community transformation. During my time in Indonesia, I had the opportunity to travel to different provinces to see the contribution of fisheries sector to Indonesia's development. I was interested in how fish farming could contribute to poverty alleviation in poor communities in Indonesia. The lessons I learned from Indonesia had opened up my mind on how fish farming has a great potential to become a key driver for food security and economic development in Tanzania. In 2018, I decided to conduct a survey on Tanzanian fish farmers...that was why I decided to embark on research to find out how Indonesia succeeded in fish farming and why fish feed in Indonesia was more affordable than in Tanzania. It was from my research that my colleagues and I decided to find alternative fish feed. In short, NovFeed was born out of Indonesia. NovFeed is now helping fish farmers to reduce production cost and produce healthier fish for community to consume, and eventually for food-secure Tanzania."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.17-18)
Muyanja Ssenyonga Z. Jameaba, Uganda	Master of Arts in Public Policy and Administration, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM)	*"I have been experiencing the best of both worlds – being an African studying, living in Indonesia, has helped me evolve personally and professionally. My exposure to African, especially Ugandan, values, norms, customs, and belief system allows me to offer different insights and cases into the way my subjects are taught in Indonesia, and the other way around."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.21-22)
Shadi Emad. A. Alhaleh, Palestine	Master of Science in Accounting, Universitas Negeri Malang (UM)	*"I got to know so many engaging students and exchanged different topics, not just about studies. KNB Scholarship, through UM, has laid an intellectual foundation into my professional career as an academic who strives for excellence in my field of study. At the same time, it also has shaped my perspective that wisdom and positivity are prime in life."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.27)
Niyomukiza John Bosco, Uganda	Master of Science in Civil Engineering, Universitas Diponegoro (UnDip)	*"I was able to acquire relevant skills on how to do research and write good scientific papers... These research and writing skills have enabled me to write four scientific articles when I was in Indonesia, one of them was published in the International Soil and Water Conservation Research journal, another one was published by Atlantis Press, and the other two were published in IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science... I came back to Uganda and was appointed a lecturer position in the Department of Civil Engineering of the International University of East Africa."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.33-34)

Aboyitungiye J. Baptiste, Burundi	Master of Science in Economics, Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS)	*"Having graduated from UNS with the support of KNB Scholarship, I am very confident in both my academic and cultural skills. I can now apply the knowledge that I obtained from Indonesia to develop my community and more widely my country, Burundi. With no delay, after getting my Master diploma approved by the Ministry of Education of Burundi, I got a job as a lecturer at the Burundi National University. With my qualification, I have been asked to teach at several different private universities too. I am very content with the intellectual pathway that I built through KNB Scholarship. I can confidently look into myself and find the 'someone' whom the world can benefit from."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.39-40)
Thipphongphat Manivong, Laos	Master of Education in Sports Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)	*"Studying in Indonesia has given me various career opportunities. The knowledge from my study allows me to contribute to sports development in Laos, for example preparing for the Olympics and general training. Luckily, my efforts paid off. Laos got 1 silver and 2 bronze at the 18th Asian Games in Jakarta-Palembang 2018, 2 Bronzes for 18th World Pecak Silat Championship in Singapore 2018, 1 silver, 4 bronzes for the 11th ASEAN School Games at Semarang, Indonesia 2019, 3 silvers, 3 bronzes for the 1st World Beach Pencak Silat Championship at Phuket province, Thailand 2019 and 2 bronzes medal for the 30th SEA Games in Philippine in 2019. I also succeeded in establishing cooperation between the Laos Ministry of Education and the Indonesian Embassy in the field of sports and culture in providing uniforms and funds for the Laos Pencak Silat team. In addition, my proficiency in speaking Indonesian allows me to become a referee, team manager, interpreter and translator. In 2014, I helped a coach from the Timor Leste team to communicate with technical delegate for the 16th ASEAN University Game 2014 in Palembang."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.42)
Igor Didier Sabukunze, Burundi	Master of Science in Informatics Engineering, Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta (UAJY)	*"During my stay in Indonesia, I learned to understand myself and improve my knowledge by visiting several places to understand Indonesians and what I could learn from them. I was motivated while seeing how young Indonesians are trying to survive by working and creating jobs to leverage their compatriots' welfare in the years to come."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.45)
Matty Senghore, Gambia	Bachelor of Science in Communication Science, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA)	*"I have gotten the opportunity to meet different people from different countries, and looked at the world differently. I am able to better understand and tolerate differences. Furthermore, I appreciate the opportunity to learn about a vastly different culture."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.50)
Nurtilek Kadyrov, Kyrgyztan	Master of Education in English Language Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS)	*"During my bachelor's degree program, I got an opportunity to do my KKN (community service) in one of the villages in Semarang called Mijen where we did a community outreach on sanitation and hygiene. The local people there were kind and hospitable."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.55)
Khamsone Lorxaypao, Lao PDR	Master of Education in Mathematics Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY)	*"During my study in Indonesia under the KNB Scholarship, I also got the opportunity to learn the Indonesian education system which is different from my country such as a teaching method that allows students to think and innovate more. I believe many of which should be taken as lessons and could be applied in my country. In addition to bringing in technical knowledge, I will take the skill of knowledge gained from the advice of teachers and all my friends to develop myself and advise my department to be aware of the differences in Indonesia and in Laos to learn the best practices on suitability and modernity."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.57)

Beyond the classroom, KNB scholars enrolled in bachelor's degree program are offered opportunities to experience *Kuliah Kerja Nyata (*KKN*)*[1]. This hands-on experience not only deepens KNB scholars' understanding of Indonesian society and development practices, but also strengthens their cultural immersion and social responsibility. Through KKN, they are deployed to rural areas to collaborate on local development initiatives. In some documented cases, scholars engaged in a healthcare outreach project, taught local pupils, and supported village officers in developing village-based Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). One KNB scholar recalled his KKN experience in Mijen, Semarang, where he engaged in outreach activities on sanitation and hygiene. Another KNB scholar contributed to improving the black soldier fly farming industry in a village in Yogyakarta, which allows him to apply practical skills in support of community-based innovations. Through community-based activities like these, KNB scholars engage directly with local realities, fostering empathy, mutual learning, and grassroots connection. These elements reinforce the scholarship's role in advancing a decolonial approach that values local knowledge, community participation, and cross-cultural solidarity.

Another is joining summer camps and cultural programs hosted by universities across different islands. These programs allow students to explore regional cultures beyond their host institutions. From learning traditional Javanese dances and Balinese songs to participating in Batik-making workshops and local farming or fishing practices in Sulawesi, these immersive experiences expose scholars to Indonesia's diverse cultural needlework. Many activities also include sustainability themes, helping to foster appreciation not only for Indonesia's traditions but also its commitment to environmental and social values. This emphasis on fostering inclusive and globally engaged education aligns with the transformative impact of intercultural learning environments. Hence, Indonesia has designated the establishment of international programs as a key component of its HEIs internationalization agenda and seeks to bridge the gap with more advanced nations and establish itself as a competitive force within the international community, striving for parity in global academic, economic, and diplomatic arenas (Republic of Indonesia, 2007; Ministry of National Development Planning, 2019). Consequently, both private and public universities actively develop programs designed to appeal to international students (Situmorang et al., 2021). Though there are challenges (Gayatri & Adhini, 2016; Widiasih et al., 2020; Defina & Rizkillah, 2021; Bibi & Hamida, 2024; Saharudin et al., 2024), In line with Irayanti et al. (2025), this study found that international students in Indonesia undergo significant intercultural and ethical development, deepening their appreciation for diverse cultural norms

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[5] *Kuliah Kerja Nyata* (KKN) is a community service program required of Indonesian university students, where they apply academic knowledge to support local development initiatives, often in rural or underserved areas.

through reflective engagement. Their study accentuates the role of structured intercultural education in shaping ethical behavior and fostering empathy, cultural sensitivity, and mutual respect. These findings reinforce the value of initiatives like KNB, which not only facilitate academic mobility but also contribute to Indonesia's broader vision of promoting cross-cultural understanding and ethical global citizenship.

Redefining Global South Knowledge Production

The KNB scholarship program's commitment to facilitating the exchange of knowledge between countries of the Global South serves as an antidote to the Western hegemony over knowledge production. It helps bridge the gap between academic institutions and indigenous knowledge systems, which have been marginalized by Western models.

Figure 10. Marginalization and Resistance in Global South–North Knowledge Relations
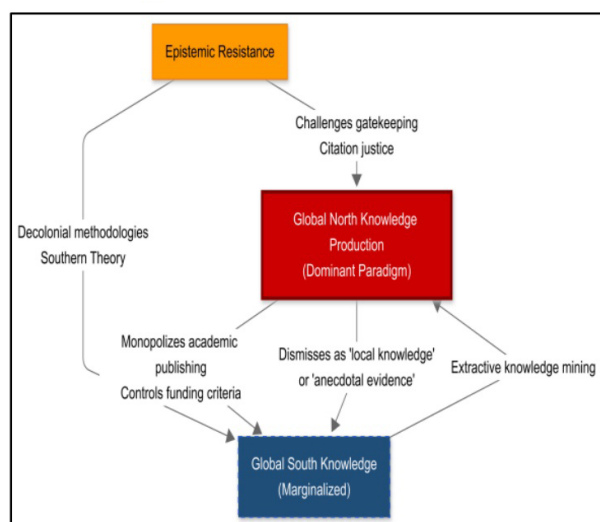
To illustrate this shift, the following sections will detail four essential elements, derived from data analysis, through which it contributes to a more balanced global knowledge production.

Firstly, the program challenges Western-centric paradigms. The global academic system is rooted in Western-centric epistemologies, marginalizing non-Western perspectives and limiting diverse intellectual exploration. The KNB Scholarship is a direct response to the "North-South divide" that has historically structured global knowledge production and flows. In this divide, knowledge production has overwhelmingly taken place in the North, while the South has primarily been positioned as a passive recipient of that knowledge. This imbalance is not merely a matter of intellectual inequality but also has real-world implications for policy, governance, and development strategies. The KNB Scholarship actively challenges this by providing opportunities for scholars from the Global South to pursue higher education in Indonesia, where they can produce academic writings and research enriched by Indonesia's educational approach and grounded in their own local perspectives and realities. By allowing scholars from diverse developing nations to come together, the KNB program provides an invaluable space for the creation of alternative knowledge frameworks that reflect the lived realities, cultures, and histories of the Global South, thus redefining knowledge production. This process of epistemic decolonization is essential not only for empowering individuals but also for reimagining

development and global governance in a way that is more inclusive and representative of the diverse experiences of the Global South. Encouraging the development of epistemic autonomy by giving participants the tools and platforms to engage critically with Western knowledge systems through Global South lens, particularly through Indonesia's world view, this empowerment, in turn, creates new possibilities for intellectual and developmental strategies that are more in tune with the realities and aspirations of Global South nations.

In practice, the KNB Scholarship has led to numerous success stories of scholarship recipients who have used their knowledge to contribute directly to local and regional development. For example, KNB scholars have engaged in the design of sustainable development initiatives that address issues such as climate change, food security, and healthcare in their home countries, drawing on both the academic training they received in Indonesia and their own indigenous knowledge systems. These projects serve as concrete examples of how the KNB program is fostering the creation of alternative knowledge that is both locally relevant and globally impactful. In this way, the KNB program does not simply challenge Western-centric epistemologies; it also actively builds the intellectual capacities of the Global South to craft their own solutions to the challenges they face.

Notable example is the case of Dr. Muyanja Ssenyonga Z. Jameaba, a KNB recipient from Uganda who pursued a Master in Public Policy and Administration at

Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). He shared that being African, particularly Ugandan, enables him to offer distinct insights into "*how subjects are taught in Indonesia and the other way around* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.21-22)." This exposure to diverse perspectives and alternative epistemologies disrupts traditional hierarchies and promotes a more inclusive approach to knowledge production.

Secondly, the program fosters equitable partnerships, as Sanjaya Lall (1985) conceptualized.. The KNB Scholarship promotes SSC based on principles of mutual respect, equality, and shared development goals. Unlike traditional North-South programs that often perpetuate dependency, the Indonesian government emphasizes collaborative learning and knowledge exchange that benefits both Indonesia and participating countries (Rahasimamonjy, 2022). Indeed, a significant contribution of the program lies in its potential to challenge the imbued knowledge power dynamics shaped by colonialism.

By facilitating transformative exchanges among scholars from developing countries, the program challenges traditional power structures, aligning with constructivist views that norms and identities evolve through interaction. In doing so, it promotes knowledge and cultural exchange that challenges Global North-dominated norms, fostering a more equitable and diverse intellectual landscape.

KNB Scholarship, without question, challenges these institutionalized power structures by providing a platform for cross-

cultural academic exchange in Indonesia. The program fully embraces the concept of "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988) and recognizes the significance of "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980), which are typically marginalized within mainstream academic frameworks. By aligning itself with the movement towards knowledge decolonization, the program forcefully contests the flawed assumption that Western epistemologies alone are universally valid. By unequivocally providing a platform for students to study in Indonesia and engage with diverse local knowledge systems, it dismantles traditional knowledge hierarchies and decisively creates space for a multitude of epistemic perspectives.

An example is Mr. Thipphongphat Manivong from Laos, who pursued a Master's in Sports Education at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI). He gained expertise in martial arts, particularly Pencak Silat, and plans to establish a training center in Vientiane. Alongside his studies, he immersed himself in traditional Indonesian arts, including Madura dances, Surabaya songs, and musical instruments like Gamelan and Angklung. His story embodies the Bandung Spirit, as the knowledge he gained in Indonesia has contributed to sports development in Laos, particularly in Olympic training and general sports preparation. His efforts bore fruit as Laos achieved success in Pencak Silat at various international competitions and facilitated cooperation between the Laos Ministry of Education and the Indonesian Embassy in sports and culture, providing uniforms and funds for

the Laos Pencak Silat team. Proficient in Indonesian, he served as a referee, team manager, interpreter, and translator. In 2014, he assisted the Timor Leste team at the 16th ASEAN University Games (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, pp. 41–42).

Figure 11. Lao PDR's Pencak Silak Players Photo Session

Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p. 41).

Thirdly, the program empowers scholars from the Global South. By providing access to quality education and research opportunities, the program enhances the capacity of these scholars to contribute to knowledge production, innovation, and development in their home countries. KNB alumni become agents of change, driving progress and development in their respective fields.

The cases of KNB scholars Meaza Haddis Gebeyehu from Ethiopia and Hang Nguyen Thi Thu from Vietnam provide strong examples of how the program empowers scholars from the Global South. Gebeyehu pursued a Master's in International Trade Law at Universitas Indonesia (UI), overcoming the challenge of studying in Indonesian, graduating cum laude (DGHE-RT

MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.23). Nguyen, after completing a Master's in Indonesian Language Education at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM), became a lecturer at Ho Chi Minh City Open University, gaining confidence through her teaching practice (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.29-30).

Capacity building, as conceptualized in the KNB program, is deeply tied to sustainable development across political, social, and economic dimensions. The program equips students with knowledge that is academically rigorous and practically relevant to addressing complex Global South issues such as climate change, inequality, and global health. As Robert Chambers (2005) asserts, development should be a locally driven process, with knowledge production emerging from the bottom up rather than being externally imposed.

The KNB program empowers scholars to craft contextually relevant, sustainable solutions, enhancing their countries' developmental sovereignty and epistemic autonomy, and enabling them to shape their own futures without relying on foreign development models. The KNB Scholarship also plays a crucial role in capacity building for sustainable development, a key priority in the global development agenda. Sustainability demands a systems approach that integrates economic, social, and environmental factors and involves diverse actors in decision-making (Morrow & Rondinelli, 2002). By training scholars from across the Global South, the KNB program equips recipient countries with advanced knowledge and skills in areas such as environmental science, renewable energy, public health, and social entrepreneurship—contributing to locally grounded, sustainable development solutions.

Take, for instance, Mojtaba Maktabifard—a KNB graduate with a master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Institut Teknologi Bandung—who is now advancing sustainable and energy-efficient technologies at R2M Solution (n.d.), illustrating the program's tangible role in global development. Moreover, by centering knowledge exchange within the Global South, the KNB program nurtures alternative epistemologies and supports a shift toward a more equitable and multipolar world order.

Table 5. Study Programs and Majors offered in KNB Scholarship

Study Program	Majors
Humanity	• Humanity • Literary Studies • Linguistics • History • Philosophy • Anthropology • Cultural Studies
Engineering	• Chemical Engineering • Civil Engineering • Architectural Engineering • Electrical Engineering • Naval Architect & Marine Engineering • Environmental Engineering • Mechanical Engineering • Computer Engineering • Information Engineering

Sciences	• Biology • Biotechnology • Food Science • Physics • Geography • Geology • Forestry • Chemistry • Marine Science • Biomedical Sciences • Remote Sensing • Computer • Mathematics • Statistics • Environmental Sciences • Public Health • Sports Science • Pharmacy • Nursing • Agricultural & Aquacultural Science • Disaster Risk Management • Library and Information Science	**Education**	• Educational Science • Social Science Education • Sports Science Education • Natural Science Education • Islamic Education • Mathematics Education • School Teacher Education • Out of School / Non-formal Education • Applied Linguistics • Language Education • History Education • Arts Education • Music Education • Instructional Education • Educational Management • Educational Research • Vocational & Technology Education
Social Sciences	• Public Administration • Political Science • Public Policy • Civics • Ethics • Sociology • Psychology • Demography • Law • Business • Religion Study • Economics Development • Communication & Media • International Relations • Accounting • Management • Community Empowerment		
Arts	• Fashionary Arts • Culinary Arts • Visual Arts • Performing Arts		

Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2024, p. 26-108).

Fourth, tapping into a bold idea that "there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice" (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 42), the program becomes a powerful instrument for advancing this epistemic justice. It disrupts traditional hierarchies of knowledge by centering Global South epistemologies—promotes the sharing of best practices, innovative solutions, and contextualized knowledge that address the specific needs and challenges of developing countries. This exchange enriches global perspectives and fosters a respectful dialogue aimed at mutual emancipation. Additionally, the program builds capacity and promotes sustainable development by prioritizing

academic fields relevant to the development needs of participating countries, such as engineering, agriculture, and healthcare. This ensures that scholars acquire knowledge and skills directly applicable to addressing development challenges.

KNB Scholarship Program is designed to foster equitable exchange between the Global South, focusing on building capacity and promoting knowledge sharing that benefits both Indonesia and the recipient countries. The KNB Scholarship fosters knowledge production deep-seated in local contexts and experiences, advancing epistemic decolonization. The concept of epistemic autonomy, as put forth by scholars like Scanlon (1972), Code (1991), Fricker (2006), Zagzebski (2007), McMyler (2011), and Ahlstrom-Vij (2013, 92), further illuminates the critical role of the KNB Scholarship in the decolonization of knowledge.

For instance, Otaigo Elisha, a KNB Scholarship recipient from Tanzania, pursued a Master of Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Economics at Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) University. As one of the founders of NovFeed, a non-profit Tanzania-based organization that focuses on food security and sustainable fish farming, Otaigo shared how studying in Indonesia, supported by the KNB Scholarship, inspired him to establish NovFeed, as he stipulated, "*was born in Indonesia*" (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.17-18). Decolonization (Bonn, 1932) and deglobalization (Bello, 2001) are key concepts for understanding the KNB Scholarship Program within global

knowledge production. The intellectual capital generated through the KNB program helps create a cadre of well-trained experts who can engage in multilateral policy discussions and strengthen the position of developing countries in global governance institutions. It plays a key role in fostering the "counter-hegemonic" knowledge production discussed by scholars such as Wallerstein (2004).

Table 6. Selected Academic Outputs and Intellectual Contributions of KNB Scholars by Global South Subregions

Global South Subregions	Scholars, Country	Degree Program	Article / Thesis / Dissertation	In-text Citation
Central America	Daniel Antonio Cabrera, Mexico	Master of Education in Music Arts Education	*Pengaruh Musik Amerika Latin Terhadap Indonesia (Influence of Latin America's Music in Indonesia)*	(Cabrera, 2020)
South America	Edixon Daniel Ortiz Villamizar, Colombia	Master of Science in Chemistry Engineering	*Bio-oil Synthesis from Botryococcus braunii by Microwave-assisted Pyrolysis*	(Villamizar, 2021)
Northern Africa	Sohila Ahmad Esmatt, Egypt	Master of Education in Arabic Language Education	*Al-'amiyah wa al-fusha baina al-khiyal wa al-waqi (Colloquial and Classical Arabic: Between Theories and Applications)*	(Esmatt, 2024)
Sub-saharan Africa	Otaigo Elisha, Tanzania	Master of Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Economics	*Analysis of Production and Consumption of Palm-Oil Based Biofuel using System Dynamics Model: Case of Indonesia*	(Elisha et al., 2019)
Middle East	Heba Wadi, Palestine	Master of Arts in Literature and Cultural Studies	*Features of Resistance Literature in the Palestinian Literature: Ghassan Kanafani's Works as Examples*	(Wadi, 2020)
Central Asia	Shaukat Rahman Ansari, Afghanistan	Bachelor of Science in Economics and Developmental Studies	*Causality Test between Foreign Aid and Economic Growth: The Case of Afghanistan*	(Ansari, 2023)
South Asia	Arefin Islam Sourav, Bangladesh	Master of Science in Informatics	*Smart System Architecture Design in the Field of Precision Agriculture Based on IoT in Bangladesh*	(Sourav, 2020)
Southeast Asia	Raisalam Delos Trico Angoy, Philippines	Doctor of Education in Sports Education	*An Insight into 3Ps Coaches' Knowledge and Its Integration to Coaching Practice and Sports Training Program: Filipino Context*	(Angoy et al., 2024)
Oceania	Inoke Raseru, Fiji	Masters of Arts in International Relations	*Marketing Communication Strategy During Covid-19 on Tourism Attraction in Tamansari Village*	(Raseru, 2023)

The data reveal that the KNB Scholarship Program challenges the unidirectional knowledge flows that have traditionally been characteristic of North-South relations. Through its emphasis on fostering collaborations between scholars from the Global South, this allows for a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and epistemologies to converge, breaking down the barriers that have kept non-Western knowledge systems at the periphery of global intellectual debates. As such, the KNB Scholarship contributes not only to the diversification of knowledge production but also to the emergence of a more pluralistic, democratic global intellectual order. Epistemic violence has not only hindered the development of alternative worldviews but also simplified complex social structures into binaries, like the state/civil society divide, consolidating Western power (Meneses, 2005). The KNB Program, however, seeks to integrate indigenous knowledge with academic research by encouraging scholars to merge scientific inquiry with traditional wisdom (See Table 6). This approach fosters an environment where local knowledge is respected and seen as complementary to global academic paradigms. The synergy between scientific research and indigenous knowledge creates hybrid forms of knowledge essential for tackling global challenges, especially those unique to the Global South, such as technological development, engineering innovation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, food sovereignty, and cultural preservation.

Figure 12. The Geography of Global South Knowledge Production via KNB Scholarship Program

Rejecting the Global North's monopoly on knowledge is crucial for global justice and equitable development. The KNB Scholarship contributes to this by promoting inclusivity and representation, addressing the underrepresentation of Global South scholars in global academic networks. By offering qualified students from the Global South opportunities to engage with Indonesian academic institutions, the program strengthens cross-cultural exchanges and encourages new perspectives. As students return home, they bring not only technical knowledge but also the ability to shape local policies, ensuring that knowledge aligns with community needs. The KNB Scholarship also supports the internationalization of higher education in the Global South, fostering an educational ecosystem where developing countries are central to knowledge production, in line with postcolonial theory's emphasis on self-

determination and autonomy. From the perspective of knowledge decolonization, the KNB Scholarship promotes an intellectual and research culture integrated in the realities of the Global South, rather than Western ideals. By fostering a locally relevant, socially transformative research agenda, the program can drive a paradigm shift in knowledge production. Following this line of thought, it serves as a strategic intervention against the dominance of Western-centric knowledge systems, which, as Breidlid (2013) explains, permeate global education and uphold structural inequalities. By funding scholars from the Global South, the program disrupts academic neocolonialism and opens space for alternative, community-rooted epistemologies. Aligned with the goals of the Global Social Forum, which challenges neoliberal institutions and advocates for equitable global governance (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2010), the KNB program empowers scholars to resist the "master imaginary." In doing so, the program advances epistemic justice and fosters pluralism in global discourse and policy.

Figure 13. How KNB Scholarship Programs Redefines Global South Knowledge Production
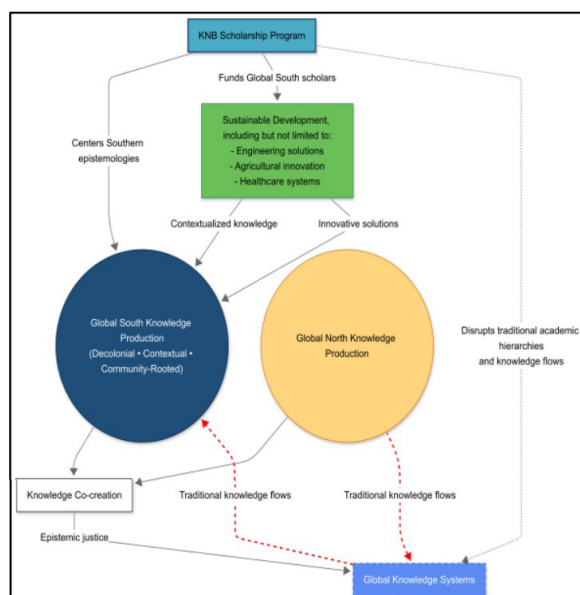
These findings point to the emergence of "KNB Diplomacy"—a model of decolonial soft power rooted in Indonesia's strategic use of the KNB Scholarship Program to foster educational, cultural, and geopolitical influence across the Global South. More than just a development assistance initiative, KNB Diplomacy reflects Indonesia's broader ambition to exercise agency in IR while positioning itself as a moral and intellectual leader among postcolonial nations. It challenges conventional understandings of soft power that are often rooted in Western liberalism and global hierarchies by promoting solidarity, cultural exchange, and knowledge-sharing on horizontal rather than hierarchical terms. Rather than imposing dominant norms, it opens a space where recipient scholars not only study in Indonesia but also share their own cultures and perspectives, contributing to a transnational dialogue among Global

South actors. This model aligns more closely with postcolonial frameworks that seek to dismantle asymmetrical power relations and redefine international cooperation through shared histories, mutual respect, and sovereign development goals.

Looking ahead, KNB Diplomacy may serve as a reference point for other Global South nations aspiring to engage in educational and cultural diplomacy that affirms their identities, priorities, and worldviews. As Indonesia continues to elevate its regional and global role, this model of engagement offers a powerful response to the enduring legacies of colonialism and intellectual dependency. If institutionalized further—with more inter-university collaboration, reciprocal exchanges, and inclusive narratives—KNB Diplomacy holds the potential to not only shape a new generation of transnational leaders but also contribute to the emergence of a more equitable, multipolar, and decolonized world order.

Table 7. Linking KNB Scholarship Features to Indonesia's Soft Power and Global South Knowledge Production

Features	How KNB Scholarship Program Redefines Indonesia's Soft Power	How KNB Scholarship Program Contributes to Global South Knowledge Production
Program Objective: To provide scholarships to students from developing countries to study in Indonesia.	Enhances the attractiveness of Indonesia as a study destination.	Provides opportunities for diverse perspectives in knowledge creation.
Target Beneficiaries: Students from the Global South	Fosters relationships with future leaders in developing nations.	Centers the program around the needs and perspectives of the Global South.
Scholarship Coverage: Tuition fees, living expenses, health insurance, and round-trip airfare.	Removes financial barriers, making the program accessible and attractive.	Enables participation of scholars who may lack resources in their home countries.
Program Focus: Promoting South-South cooperation (SSC), empowering scholars from developing countries, and facilitating knowledge exchange.	Positions Indonesia as a leader in South-South cooperation (SSC).	Directly addresses the power imbalances in knowledge production.
Expected Outcomes: Enhanced human capital development in developing countries, strengthened diplomatic ties, and increased cultural exchange	Creates a network of alumni who are goodwill ambassadors for Indonesia.	Fosters a more balanced and inclusive global knowledge landscape.

KNB DIPLOMACY

Conclusion and Recommendations

As the global order shifts toward multipolarity, educational diplomacy has become vital for the Global South to assert sovereignty and promote equitable global governance. The KNB Scholarship Program exemplifies this by expanding educational access, fostering SSC, and challenging Western-centric knowledge frameworks. Rooted in Bandung Conference principles, it advances intellectual autonomy and strengthens Indonesia's diplomatic influence in shaping a more inclusive, decolonized global order. This study demonstrates that the

KNB Scholarship Program plays a significant role in redefining Indonesia's soft power and knowledge production— establishing what can be recognized as KNB Diplomacy. While the KNB Scholarship Program expands access for the Global South, it may not fully address the persistent Western epistemic violence in educational systems. Efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), while valuable, have been criticized, emphasizing that DEI initiatives often address only superficial diversity without confronting deeper power structures in global knowledge production. True decolonization requires not just inclusion but a fundamental shift in the structures of knowledge production that uphold unequal global power dynamics. Nevertheless, the KNB Scholarship is a significant step toward decolonizing IR and knowledge production. By confronting colonial legacies, it offers a transformative opportunity to break free from dominant epistemic frameworks. It empowers scholars from the Global South to reconnect with their cultural and intellectual contexts, reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems long marginalized by Western thought. Decolonizing knowledge, therefore, is not only about critiquing Western paradigms but reimagining the intellectual canon to include diverse, often silenced, perspectives. That is to say, to further enhance its impact, the program should:

- Expand language training and academic support services for scholars to integrate more structured mentorship programs to ease cultural and academic transitions.

- Conduct longitudinal studies on the career trajectories of KNB alumni to measure long-term influence.
- Strengthen research collaboration between Indonesian universities and institutions in recipient countries.

Hence, the KNB Scholarship can serve as a successful model for South-South educational cooperation, contributing to a more balanced and inclusive global knowledge ecosystem.

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Indonesia's View: Eradicating Colonialism and

Supporting Palestine

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This study aims to analyze the reasons behind Indonesia's support for Palestine after the October 7 attacks despite challenges both domestically and internationally. Indonesia faces domestic criticism for prioritizing support for Palestine over pressing internal issues such as poverty and human rights abuses. Internationally, Indonesia faces pressure from Western countries such as the US and UK, as well as challenges from OIC member states that normalized relations with Israel. Indonesia's actions are analyzed in National Interest Perspective. From a national interest perspective, Indonesia aims to demonstrate religious and humanitarian solidarity while in an international interest, Indonesia seeks to assert itself as a global leader in human rights, strengthen its friendship with developing countries, and fulfill its role as legitimate leader of Bandung Conference 1955 and as a member of international organizations like UN Security Council and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in maintaining world peace. This support has been continuous and very consistent since the beginning of Indonesia's independence until the Jokowi administration era. Using explanatory methods and data collection through library research, this study concludes that although Indonesia's support for Palestine has not succeeded in ending the conflict with Israel, these efforts have shown Indonesia's courage in challenging the status quo and strengthening its diplomatic position and identity in international politics. In conclusion, Indonesia's support for Palestine is driven by its historical and ideological commitment, humanitarian principles, public and political support, strategic diplomatic influence, continuity in foreign policy, and ability to navigate international pressure in order to eradicating colonialism brought by Israel and its allies.

Keywords: *National Interests, Humanity, Indonesia, Palestine*

Introduction

Indonesia's consistent foreign policy of being in favour of Palestine is influenced by the peaceful spirit of the Bandung Conference (1955). The Bandung Conference was an important event in the history of post-colonial international relations, emphasising the principles of anti-colonialism, self-determination, and non-intervention (Weber & Winanti, 2016). The final communiqué of the conference explicitly addressed the Palestinian issue, advocating for the rights of the Palestinian people and eradicating colonialism and imperialism (Umar, 2019).

Not just a foreign policy issue, Indonesia's standing position for Palestine also reflects its enduring legacy of commitment and spirit of Bandung solidarity

among developing countries (Brigg et al., 2016). Following the events of 7 October, Indonesia has reaffirmed its support for Palestine, condemned the violence, and called for a peaceful settlement (Setiawati, 2024). This research will analyze the importance of Indonesia's support for Palestine after the October 7th 2023 attack amid the emergence of parties aiming to normalize relations with the opposing side, Israel.

On October 7th, 2023, armed groups led by Hamas carried out coordinated attacks in southern Israel, attacking Israeli military bases. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, these actions included the direct shooting of civilians, the burning of homes, and the taking of hostages (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Hamas rejected those findings and accused HRW of being unprofessional and biased against Israel, and called for the report to be retracted (Al Jazeera, 2024). Hamas launched the attack in response to more than a century of colonization and oppression endured by the Palestinian people, including ethnic cleansing, forced land occupation, a suffocating blockade, and continued human rights violations by Israel (Kusuma, 2024).

Facing the conflict, Indonesia received double standard sentiment for Papua from inside (Jubi, 2021) and pressure to normalize its diplomatic relations from outside of the country (Meiliana, 2024). From within the country, despite having different roots, what is happening in Papua and Palestine has similarities in terms of violence and potential human rights violations, but for a long time, the government controlled all

information concerning Papua. This stands in stark contrast to information concerning Palestine (Amindoni, 2021).

External parties that contradict Indonesia's support for Palestine come from countries that embrace democracy, human rights and international liberalism, such as the United States, which continues to send military aid to Israel (United States Department of State, 2025). Then UK, which tends to be indecisive in responding to UN resolutions (UK Government, 2024). In addition, several Arab countries/members of the OIC (Qatar, Bahrain, Morocco and the UAE) that are supposed to support investigations into Israeli armed violence, instead maintain their diplomatic relations with the human rights violator (Israel) (CNN, 2023).

Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi said that

"*There is a lot of pressure on Indonesia to start normalizing relations with Israel. And I said that we are not closed. But there are conditions, which is the two-state solution can be realized, which means that Palestine is independent, Palestine has a state and is recognized by Israel, to coexist with Israel* (Meiliana, 2024).

Despite the distinctions among countries, Indonesia's action has been in line with Bandung's principles of non-intervention and respect for sovereignty.

Furthermore, on January 23, 2024, Retno Marsudi delivered three statements in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Open Debate in New York. First, the importance of an immediate and permanent ceasefire. Second, Palestine must be

immediately accepted as a full member of the UN, and third, to stop the supply of weapons to Israel (Kemlu, 2024). Minister Retno and other heads of state delegations also walked out of the room when Israel's permanent envoy delivered his statement (Jakarta Globe, 2024), demonstrating symbolic opposition and diplomatic aggressiveness.

Various studies have shown that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most complex international issues and has a broad impact on global geopolitical dynamics. In this context, Indonesia has taken a strategic step by applying the concept of defense management to support a peaceful resolution. According to Asakir and Almubaroq (2024), Indonesia plays an important role through active participation in international forums such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Indonesia's focus is on diplomacy and international cooperation, where the country has consistently supported a two-state solution as a just way out of the conflict.

Setiawati (2024), explore the motivations behind Indonesia's consistent support for Middle Eastern conflict resolution. Indonesia's commitment to resolving the Middle East conflict is not only based on equal status as developing countries or the rules in the constitution, but also on Islamic solidarity towards the majority of the population of the region.

Nugraha and Maura (2023) conducted a study which aims to analyze Indonesia's foreign policy objectives from 2014 to 2023. They show that promoting and securing human security for the Palestinian people

is the primary goal that the Indonesian government aims to achieve in every effort for Palestine. It's because the role of power holders is seen as focusing only on state security without integrating a focus on humans as individuals or groups threatened by military attacks

Sembiring & Oktreza, (2024) seeks to review Indonesia's support for Palestine. Indonesia shows strong solidarity with Palestine through various forms of support. One if from action by civil society, such as demonstrations, fundraising, or awareness campaigns. The Indonesian civil society stands with the Palestinian people who are struggling. Another is through government aid with Indonesia provides other assistance in the form of food and medicine as well as plans to send a hospital ship from the Indonesian Navy to Egypt to be an additional medical facility to treat and heal victims of the war in Gaza.

The literature review concludes that Indonesia's support for Palestine is driven by the equal of status as Southern nation-state and for the sake of protecting human security. One study also shows concrete evidence of this support through actions taken by both the government and civil society. Nevertheless, previous studies haves yet to provide a comprehensive analysis in Indonesia's support for Palestine as a national interest.

This research will analyze the important reasons behind Indonesia's consistent support for Palestine along with counter-actions from various parties both at home and abroad. The concept of National

Interest is the analytical tool used in this study. Through this concept, the author can identify Indonesia's interest in Palestine as an action that is in accordance with the Indonesian constitution and the demands of Indonesian civil society.

National Interest Concept

The realist conception of national interest, in which security becomes the primary goals of the state is no longer relevant in the current era (Dermawan, 2020). The justification for this is that security concerns, actors, health issues, globalisation, regional dynamics, and technology are constantly evolving. As a result, adaptation is required to address contemporary challenges with more expansive and cooperative approaches to human rights.

Furthermore, Nuechterlein (2019) defines national interest as the perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state in relation to other sovereign states comprising the external environment. It means that national interest is no longer considered merely a theory in foreign policy-making, but becomes a reference in the foreign policy-making process itself.

Interest of a state is also the interest of the international community or in other terms, national interest is beyond national boundaries (Nye, 1999). Along with that, Weldes (1996) states that national interests are produced in the construction, through the dual mechanisms of articulation and interpellation, of representations of international politics.

Indonesian policy of continuing to support Palestine is an example of how national wealth is defined not by security or economic prosperity, but by emerging norms, transnational solidarity, and active diplomacy. It is consistent with the concept of national interest in the contemporary era, which is dynamic, ideas-driven, and linked to globalisation.

In the next section, the author will focus on explaining the significance of Indonesia's role in assisting Palestine and providing concrete evidences that the assistance provided would not be discontinued. In essence, the study seeks to answer the question of why Indonesia continues to support Palestine with qualitative explanatory method

Methodology

This research is a qualitative explanatory study that generally aims to analyze the reasons or causes behind a specific issue, in this case, the reasons for Indonesia's support for Palestine in the Palestine-Israel conflict. The research involves several stages: data elimination, data analysis, and conclusion. Data elimination involves summarizing data to focus on key aspects deemed important in analyzing Indonesia's national interests and its continuous support for Palestine.

In the data analysis stage, the data obtained, whether in the form of narrative texts or interview transcripts, are comprehensively analyzed. For instance, statements from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs are examined to interpret their meaning. This helps in understanding

the underlying reasons and motivations for Indonesia's support.

The final stage involves testing the preliminary conclusions drawn from the data analysis. The validity of these conclusions then matched against evidence obtained from various sources. This cross-verification ensures that the conclusions are robust and well-supported by the data. The conclusion phase is critical in forming a coherent analysis that explains the challenges and issues related to Indonesia's support for Palestine. These three step methods collectively assist the researcher in constructing an analytical framework that explains the challenges and problems surrounding Indonesia's support for Palestine.

History of Indonesia's Support for Palestine

The long history of Indonesia's support for Palestine could be analyzed through the continuity and change approach. Continuity refers to the consistency of policy patterns that have persisted for a considerable period. Although it encompasses minor changes, these changes do not alter the overall policy principles. Change refers to significant changes in policy and cannot be separated from various triggers, both domestic and international (Yani, 2009). These two concepts could guide the understanding of Indonesia's foreign policy towards Palestine, whether there have been significant changes (Change) despite changes in governance models and leadership, or whether Indonesia's continuity (Continuity) in supporting Palestine has grown stronger.

Indonesia's favourable relationship with Palestine is a legacy of the Soekarno era, which explicitly prioritised solidarity with anti-colonial movements and developing nations. One example of this is that Israel was left out at the 1955 Bandung conference and inviting Palestinian representatives instead (Muttaqien, 2013). Requests to establish diplomatic relations from Israel were also made, but the content of the letters was never responded to by President Soekarno (Wibowo, 2021).

Indonesia's support for Palestine is the same as the attitude of Arab countries. Many of them have also recognized Indonesia's independence even before the Netherlands did so in (1949). In exchnages, Indonesia's also pledges support for Arab goals such as supporting Gamal Abdel Nasser during the 1956 Suez Crisis and boycotting Israeli athletes at the 1962 Asian Games. Even though Indonesia was later stopped by the IOC (International Olympic Committee), Soekarno was not deterred, he even sponsored the rival international sporting event by organizing the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO) as a challenging alternative (Muttaqien, 2013). Soekarno's decision was not just a political maneuver, but it was a decision to expand efforts to eradicate colonialism in all fields.

Furthermore, Indonesia strengthened its cooperation with Palestine by formally establishing diplomatic relations during the presidency of President Soeharto. During the Soeharto era, Indonesia continued to support the right of Palestinians to establish an independent state and reject Israeli occupation

of Arab territories. However, the implementation of Indonesia's foreign policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict was more moderate than during the Soekarno era. Indonesia proposed direct talks between Israel and Arab countries after the 1967 War, although this was sensitive among Arab countries that did not recognize Israel at the time. Indonesia also did not participate in the 1973 oil embargo by Arab countries against countries supporting Israel because of the pro-Western New Order regime of Soeharto, especially towards the United States. Secret relations between Indonesia and Israel also occurred, including the purchase of aircraft from Israel. In 1989, Indonesia opened the Palestinian Embassy in Jakarta to gain Arab support for Indonesia's position on East Timor and its desire to become the chair of the Non-Aligned Movement (Muttaqien, 2013).

During the presidency of President B.J. Habibie (1998-1999), which lasted only one year, Indonesia's foreign policy was greatly influenced by internal situations such as domestic political and economic stability, which were still in the process of recovery. Additionally, the presence of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) as a secondary actor in Indonesia's foreign policy also had a strong influence on the government. However, Indonesia's stance did not undergo significant changes and remained supportive of Palestine. During Habibie's presidency, Indonesia continued to support Palestinian independence and actively participated in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to resolve conflicts in the Middle East. At the time of

his death, hundreds of Muslims in Gaza, Palestine, held a memorial prayer performed at the Great Mosque of Umar in the city of Jabalia, northern Gaza, to honor and pray for the third President of Indonesia. In addition to performing prayers, Palestinians in Gaza also raised the Indonesian flag at half-mast at the international pier in the city of Gaza as a form of tribute (Jauhary, 2019).

Subsequently, during the presidency of Indonesia's fourth president, Abdurrahman Wahid (1999-2001), Indonesia was influenced by the principle of "turning enemies into friends," but with significant pressure from both domestic and international sources, this stance became firmer through condemning Israel's attacks through a press release titled "Stop Attacks on Palestine" (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2023). In the book entitled "Peace with Gus Dur," two reasons are explained for his proposal to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. First, Gus Dur wanted to ensure that the capitalist George Soros, who is of Jewish descent, did not disrupt the capital markets. Second, he wanted to enhance Indonesia's bargaining position in the Middle East because as a predominantly Muslim country, it was only natural to actively engage in peace-building efforts there. Such foreign policy was influenced by Gus Dur's perception that it was impossible for Indonesia to reconcile both sides if diplomatic relations were only established with one party (As-Sunniyah, 2021).

During Megawati's leadership (2001-2004), Indonesia pursued bilateral diplomacy with George W. Bush to halt armed conflicts

in the Middle East, but it did not result in significant pressure on the adversaries. The conflict continued to escalate until the leadership of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). Indonesia invited Hamas and PLO representatives, including Mahmoud Abbas as the President of Palestine, to foster reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, two Palestinian government factions with differing ideologies, strategies, affiliations, and political objectives (Anrian, 2023). Indonesia's efforts to firmly stand with Palestine continued during the presidency of Indonesia's seventh president, Joko Widodo, who established a special Consulate General in Ramallah and became one of the OIC's representatives to support the ceasefire in Israel (Suratiningsih et al., 2020).

Factors Influencing Indonesia's Support for Palestine

Based on the discussion above, Indonesia can be said to have consistently supported Palestine in its conflict with Israel. This is influenced by several factors. Firstly, from the opening sentence of its own 1945 Constitution:

"...colonialism must be eradicated from the earth, as it is not in line with the principles of humanity and justice."

In this context, Israel's actions in attacking Palestinian civilians are a form of colonialism that must be stopped. Secondly, Indonesia's actions are also influenced by its membership in the OIC and the UN, which both fundamentally strive for peace. Both influences are continuously applied through a series of humanitarian diplomatic

efforts conducted by Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with Indonesian Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, by sending food, clothing, medicines, and other aid to Palestine. Although the process of resolving this conflict is difficult and as of the writing of this text, the conflict remains unresolved, Indonesia's contribution to humanitarian values and global peace will never waver. In addition to domestic arrangements, Indonesia also strengthens its support for Palestine through diplomatic channels.

Indonesia reinforces its diplomacy for Palestinian independence through various international forums, including the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the UN. At the 19th NAM Summit in Kampala, January 2024, Indonesia emphasized the importance of a ceasefire in Gaza and advocated for peace processes and full Palestinian membership in the UN. Indonesia also consistently voices the rights of the Palestinian people in the UN, supporting the two-state solution, and reminds the UN Security Council of its responsibility in resolving the Palestinian issue. The Indonesian Parliament especially, the People's Representative Council (DPR), actively advocates for Palestinian independence in the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly. At the 147th IPU General Assembly in Angola, October 2023, the DPR proposed a resolution urging the cessation of Israeli attacks on Gaza, the lifting of the Gaza blockade, and the pursuit of long-term solutions for Palestinian peace. Political support for Palestinian independence

with East Jerusalem as its capital remains the primary focus (Muhamad, 2024).

Challenges to Indonesia's Support for Palestine

The challenges to Indonesia's support for Palestine come not only from external sources but also from within Indonesian society itself. The disparity in collective action and differing values of justice between Indonesia and the permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council are some of the issues on the international stage. Meanwhile, pragmatic sentiments are emerging domestically, accusing Indonesia of having asymmetrical humanitarian priorities by focusing on external issues like supporting Palestine, rather than internal problems (Medcom.id, 2021).

The differing ideological constructs of developed countries, which tend to support Israel over Palestine, came from dominant UN countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. The United States often acts as Israel's proxy in advancing its interests on the international stage, exemplified by its frequent vetoes on numerous Palestine-Israel conflict resolutions. Additionally, the US supports Israel with arms supplies, which are then used to devastate lives in Palestine (Xinhua, 2024).

According to Al Jazeera, the escalation of the fight on October 7, 2023 resulted in numerous casualties for both sides. In Gaza, at least 38,983 people were murdered, including more than 15,000 children, with over 89,727 injured and more than 10,000 reported missing. In the Occupied West Bank,

at least 578 people were killed, including more than 140 children, and over 5,300 were injured. In Israel, the dead toll rose to 1,139, with at least 8,730 injured. More than half of Gaza's homes have been destroyed or damaged, as have 80% of commercial facilities and 88% of educational structures. Hospitals, highways, and places of worship have also suffered considerable damage, worsening the humanitarian catastrophe (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Indonesia clearly condemns this partiality by the US and other developed countries. In a roundtable agenda at the United Nations Headquarters (12/12), Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi stated:

"*Those who often dictate to us about human rights are the ones who now allow Israel to violate human rights*".

Retno emphasized that no country should apply double standards in upholding human rights, as double standards are the biggest issue in the implementation of ideal human rights. She continued,

"*These actions are unjustified and in clear violation of international humanitarian law*".

Thus, it is no longer relevant to consider the United States as the world's police because it contradicts its constitution as a country that upholds human rights.

Besides the United States, Germany, the UK, and Arab countries that are racially similar to Palestinians, such as Qatar, Bahrain, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates, have also tainted their support for Palestine (Bermant, 2023). The implementation of the Abraham Accords, which unite diplomatic relations and economic cooperation between

Israel and these Arab countries, does not align with their membership in the OIC, which prioritizes human rights for Palestinians as one of its main agendas (Justin, 2020). Despite conflicting with multilateral principles, this normalization of relations has received a positive response from the international community (Fikrie et al., 2022). So why has this not occurred in Indonesia? Is it because humanitarian intervention is deeply rooted in every individual Indonesian? Or is it true that no one opposes Indonesia's continuous support for Palestine, which resurfaces like a tidal wave?

Conni Rahakundini, an academic and military and defense observer, argues that perceptions of Israel need to change to avoid viewing it solely through the lens of religious sentiment. Such sentiments, she suggests, only create a biased perception that prevents opening opportunities for bilateral relations with a country often in conflict with the Arab world (Purba, 2020). Arguments like these have gained more attention since the escalation of the conflict on October 7, 2023, but have not affected Indonesia's support for Palestine.

Some sentiments arise in Indonesia, where netizens argue that Indonesia is too pro-Palestine and neglects its responsibilities to address domestic humanitarian issues like the limited information on the ongoing conflict in Papua (Amindoni, 2021). Many netizens have also voiced that the conflict in Papua has similarities to the series of events in Israel-Palestine. Examples include acts of violence against people accused of being separatists or terrorists, the emergence of misinformation or fake news, internet blackouts in Papua, and news of developments in the armed conflict between joint TNI-Polri forces and pro-Papuan independence groups.

In addition to impacting sales, the movement like boycotting Israeli-related company already affected workers due to a sharp drop in sales. Due to the boycott, there were mass layoffs (Nugraha, 2023). Including the resignation of 3 directors in Unilever company and 126 employees who were fired from PT Nestle Indonesia in order to adjust the business to be more efficient and have the opportunity to continue growing in the future (Nada et al., 2024). Indonesia's response to the boycott is promoting import substitution and local products through a campaign called *"Bangga Buatan Indonesia"* (BBI/Proud of Indonesian-Made Products). This initiative aims to ensure that local SMEs can compete domestically and internationally, replacing Zionist-aligned products commonly consumed by the public (Unair News, 2023). also serves as a tool for effective international cooperation in reducing the impact of Zionist-related products, in line with the global solidarity principle that is upheld by Indonesia.

Indonesia's National Interest in Supporting Palestine

Nuechterlein identifies four aspects of national interest: defense, economic, world order, and ideology. In this context, Indonesia's reasons for supporting Palestine are also influenced by these four aspects.

a. Defense Issues

In terms of defense, it is crucial for Indonesia to support Palestine due to the stability and security of the region. The Israel-Gaza war is more worrying for Southeast Asians than the South China Sea row (Lin, 2024). Thus, concern arises primarily for two reasons: firstly, as fears of extremism grow, the Gaza war resonates deeply among Southeast Asian respondents in a recent survey, given the significant proportion of Muslims in the region. Secondly, the State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey highlighted concerns about the global rules-based order and a potential rise in extremist activities (South China Morning Post, 2024). Aside to Southeast Asia, Indonesia also wants to contribute to peace and stability in the Middle East, which indirectly affects international relations (Setiawati, 2024). This is related to the Indonesian government's efforts to resolve the conflict in a peaceful manner.

b. Economic Aspects

As the concept of national interest in the modern era has expanded to include external interests, the economic aspect is also an important part to discuss. The global economic issues resulting from the Palestine-Israel conflict have affected oil prices, international trade, and foreign direct investment (Dewi, 2024). In terms of support for Palestine, Indonesia strives to ensure that the economic impacts experienced by other countries do not affect its own domestic trade security.

The war in Gaza ("genocide") has had significant impacts on the international economy, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. The IMF reported that economic growth in this region did not meet projections, with a downward revision to 2.9 percent this year, due to the conflict between Israel and Hamas as well as oil production cuts by producing countries. This war has also affected revenue from the tourism sector and triggered an increase in global shipping costs due to attacks in the Red Sea by Houthis who support Palestine. Additionally, shipping companies have been forced to reroute from the Red Sea to the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, which is longer and more expensive (Kisihandi, 2024).

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva noted that this war exacerbates existing economic challenges from previous conflicts. Despite efforts to mitigate these impacts, as conveyed by Egyptian Finance Minister Mohamed Maait, spending projections remain down. Amid this situation, the IMF emphasized the importance of eliminating regressive energy subsidies to save costs, reduce pollution, and increase social spending in the region (Reuters, 2024).

The impacts of this conflict on Indonesia's macroeconomy include rising oil prices, supply disruptions, effects on the financial sector and the Indonesian Rupiah exchange rate, and impacts on the trade sector. The government also promptly reducing unnecessary spending, including non-urgent landmark projects such as the new capital city (IKN) and the high-speed train (Handayani, 2023).

Bureau of Indonesian Statistics (BPS) recorded various Israeli goods entered

Indonesia in 2023. By mid-year, machinery and mechanical equipment were the highest category with a value of 3.7 million USD. Imports of weapons and ammunition were valued at 6.5 thousand USD (Putra & Aziz, 2023). Besides imports, Indonesia actively exports various commodities to Israel, such as fats, vegetable oils, processed meat, flour, vegetables, fruits, beverages, alcohol, vinegar, salt, sulfur, cement, pulp, food industry waste, organic chemicals, and pharmaceutical products (Nugroho, 2024). However, amid these concerns, the Indonesian government remains optimistic that the impacts will not be too significant for Indonesia as the two countries are not major trading partners. The efforts made by the government to anticipate the macroeconomic impacts of the Israel-Palestine war include focusing the state budget (APBN) on strengthening people's purchasing power and controlling food price inflation, especially rice (Handayani, 2023).

c. Global Order

The global order as a national goal of Indonesia is outlined in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, *which is to protect the entire Indonesian nation and all Indonesian bloodshed, to promote public welfare, to educate the nation's life, and to participate in implementing a world order based on independence, eternal peace, and social justice* (Kemhan_RI, 2015).

Indonesia's dedication to a fair and just global order also influences its support for Palestine. Its vigorous participation in international fora that defend Palestinian rights and sovereignty reflects this (Setiawati,

2024). The position is consistent with Indonesia's "Free and Active" foreign policy, which places a strong focus on non-alignment and respect for human rights and international law (Wardhani & Dugis, 2023). By supporting Palestine, Indonesia strengthens its image as a supporter of international justice and human rights.

d. Ideology

Ideology is a systematic collection of ideas and beliefs related to human life. As an aspiration, ideology is used as the fundamental framework in the governance of a state. Indonesia adopts the Pancasila ideology, which prioritizes the cultural values, peace, justice, and religiosity of the Indonesian nation (Mahkamah Konstitusi, 2015). This is similar with the thoughts of the Palestinian people, where they also have the determination to eradicate colonization and fight for independence and human rights. The text of the Declaration of Independence of the Palestinian National Council (November 14, 1988) reads:

"*The State of Palestine declares its commitment to the principles and objectives of the United Nations, and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to the principles and policy of non-alignment*" (Palestinian National Council, 1988).

The determination of the Palestinian people to end colonization and fight for independence and human rights is also reflected in United Nations Resolution No. 8, in "The Rights of Self-Determination of the Palestinian People." The resolution states:

"*Strongly condemns all Governments which do not recognize the right to self-determination and independence of all peoples still under colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation, notably the peoples of Africa and the Palestinian people*" (United Nations, 1979).

Therefore, Indonesia's reason for supporting Palestine is a nationalist call that has been rooted as the nation's identity.

The four aspects of national interest, that not only focuses on pure political and economic interests, are a reflection of the Indonesian nation's support for Palestine. All of these are known to be inseparable from the basic values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, with its missions being anti-colonialism, respecting the sovereignty of other countries, and upholding human rights. Thus, it is also evident that Indonesia is not a materialistic state or a state that operates solely for profit, but rather a state of noble character, idealism, and integrity.

The Importance for Indonesia in Supporting Palestine Internationally

Indonesia's relationship with Palestine is not only based on religious solidarity, but also shows strategic value in strengthening diplomatic positions, national identity, and international political influence. In addition, involvement in construction projects and humanitarian aid also benefits Indonesia economically and socially.

While it has been explained earlier that Indonesia's goal to support Palestine is solely influenced by its sense of responsibility to fulfill constitutional and humanitarian

obligations, it cannot be denied that Indonesia also benefits from positive international recognition due to its stance. Some of them are the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which regularly recognizes RRI Indonesia's active role in supporting the rights of the Palestinian people at various meetings and conferences (Falah, 2016). The Palestinian government itself has several times appreciated Indonesia's strong support, which has also always been vocal in United Nations (UN) forums, including when it became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2019-2020 (RRI, 2023). In the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) forum, Indonesia has always called for international solidarity for Palestine, while many Islamic countries appreciate Indonesia's consistency in supporting Palestinian independence.

Therefore, efforts to support human rights in the Palestine-Israel conflict have never ceased. This is because the greater and more intense support Indonesia provides, the greater the opportunity for Indonesia to receive positive recognition from the international community.

Indonesia's international interests as a country that upholds human rights have yielded many positive outcomes. Besides being a well-reputed country, another benefit is Indonesia's chance to sit on the leadership seat of international organizations, receive offers for international cooperation, and strengthen bilateral relations with countries that share the same vision. Consequently, material benefits can also be indirectly obtained by Indonesia through international relations and global diplomacy with various

partner countries from different regions.

Having a good human rights reputation in the eyes of the international community provides positive legitimacy for Indonesia. The opportunity to demonstrate this existence is also done by Indonesia by taking responsibility for leading international organizations such as the UN Security Council, ASEAN, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the OIC in efforts to protect human rights. Concretely, Indonesia, represented by the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi, on January 23, 2024, delivered three statements in the Open Debate of the UN Security Council in New York City, which include, the importance of an immediate and permanent ceasefire, immediate acceptance of Palestine as a full member of the UN, and to stop the supply of weapons to Israel (Kemlu, 2024).

As for international cooperation, Indonesia's relations with countries that support Palestinian independence are also strengthening. This includes OIC membership like Turkey and East Asian partners like China. The link may be discerned through mutual collaboration, particularly in the realm of economics.

Indonesia Bilateral Cooperation with Turkey

President Joko Widodo and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan convened at the OIC Extraordinary Summit on November 11, 2023, and mutually agreed to sustain their collaboration in promoting Palestinian self-determination and finding a resolution to the Gaza predicament. Moreover, both countries have agreed to accelerate the negotiations on the Indonesia-Turkey Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IT-CEPA), aiming to complete it by 2024 (Kemlu, 2023).

Indonesia Bilateral Cooperation with China

Furthermore, Indonesia and China additionally voiced their support for the "two-state solution" and UN Security Council Resolution No. 2728, which calls for a ceasefire in Palestine, specifically in Gaza. Indonesia, along with 13 other member countries of the UN Security Council, agreed on the resolution, while the United States chose to abstain.

With the same firm stance, the special bilateral relationship between China and Indonesia brings political and economic benefits. Based on a quote from a written statement from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by spokesperson Lin Jian on April 18 in Beijing, China stated,

"China supports Indonesia in maintaining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, appreciates the Indonesian government's adherence to the One-China policy, and is willing to continue to firmly support Indonesia's core interests."

In addition, the Chinese government also intend to continue urging Chinese companies to invest and increase imports of high-quality products from Indonesia, as stated by Jian during the event, "Indonesia is expected to maintain the stability and predictability of export policy and create a favorable environment for companies" (Natalia, 2024). Thus, in addition to continuing to support Palestinian independence, Indonesia

also does not need to worry about cooperation with China as its trading partner, which operates within the same humanitarian vision as well.

Conclusion

Indonesia's steadfast support for Palestine, despite encountering opposition from both domestic and international institutions, may be understood by examining several key factors:

1. *Historical and Ideological Commitment*

Indonesia has a deep-rooted dedication to promoting the independence of Palestine, based on its own ideals of opposing colonialism and prioritizing humanitarian values. Indonesia has always supported the self-determination of Palestine since gaining independence, which is in line with the nation's foundational principles.

2. *Humanitarian Principles*

Indonesia's foreign policy prioritizes the promotion of humanitarian principles and the protection of human security. This is seen in its unwavering political and humanitarian backing for Palestine, which includes active involvement in global efforts that seek to advance Palestinian self-governance and entitlements.

3. *Public and Political Support*

The overall sentiment among the Indonesian public is in favour of the Palestinian cause, as evidenced by the active involvement of civil society groups and digital activists who work towards raising awareness

and promoting the rights of Palestinians. This domestic assistance strengthens the government's position on the matter. Indonesia's foreign policy activities are motivated by its strategic objectives in preserving its diplomatic influence in international organizations like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Indonesia's endorsement of Palestine is consistent with its overarching objectives of advancing peace and justice in the Middle East.

4. *Continuity in Indonesia's Foreign Policy*

Throughout many administrations, starting from Soekarno to Joko Widodo, Indonesia has consistently supported Palestine, showcasing a steadfastness in its foreign policy despite shifts in leadership and external influences.

5. *Navigating International Pressures*

Despite substantial pressure from nations such as the United States and domestic demands to normalize ties with Israel, Indonesia has steadfastly upheld its support for Palestine. This position is frequently presented in the framework of supporting a two-state resolution and prioritizing Palestinian self-governance prior to contemplating any alterations in diplomatic ties with Israel.

Despite strong international and domestic discourse on opening dimensions of cooperation with Israel, this does not affect Indonesia's foreign policy stance in supporting Palestine. In essence, both dimensions of interest do not aim to bring material benefits into the country, but it is Indonesia that

allocates funds to be channeled out to the Palestinian people affected by the war. The potential for international trade cooperation in the form of imports and exports is an indirect consequence of the close alignment of humanitarian values held by Indonesia with its partner countries.

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Special Issue Editors Biography

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Title
Must be brief and informative, between 15-20 words
(16pt, bold, single pharagraph spacing, 0 before-after)

First Author; Next Author; Last Author – without academic title (12pt, bold)
First Author's Affiliation (Department, University, Country) (12pt);
Second Author's Affiliation;
Third Author's Affiliation;
email@writer.ac.id (only write email for the corresponding author)

Abstract (13pt, bold)

Abstract should be typed in italic, font size 10pt, single-spacing format and justified. The abstract should briefly summarize the aim, findings, or purposes of the article. Authors encouraged to write clear explanation on methodology or conceptual framework used in the article, followed by short summary of the research findings. The end part of the abstract should give conclusion that indicates how this paper contributes to fill the gap in previous studies, or any practical implication that might occurs. The abstract should be written in one concise paragraph of no more than 250 words.

Keywords*: contains; three to five; relevant keywords; separated by semicolon; written in lower case, italic 10pt*

Guidelines (13pt, Bold, Title Case)

The manuscript should be written in English on A4-sized papers (21x29.7 cm), with custom margins as follows: left 2.5 cm, right 2 cm, bottom 2 cm, and top 2 cm. The manuscript should use Callisto MT, 12pt font size, 1.5 line spacing. Manuscript should consist of 4,000—7,000 words (research article) and 3,000—4,000 words (book review). Referencing and citing technique used is APA 6th edition, with in-text citation format

Guidelines - Introduction

All sources quoted or paraphrased should be listed in the reference list. Cite source using APA in-text citation format, by writing author's last name followed by the publication year, for example: (Hudson, 2014). Direct quotations, tables, or figures referred should include the page number, for example: (Hudson, 2010, p. 44).

The introduction part should explore these elements: (1) Explanation about the research background and the general theme or topic; (2) Provide clear and convincing answer to the question: Why is this article is important? (3) A concise literature review of available literature or research. Please cite the most imperative part, theories, or debates from existing studies; (4) Indicate how your article will contribute to fill the gap to the current studies. This is also important to show that your idea is original; (5) Offer explanation on specific problem or question[1] and hypothesis

that will be the main point(s) of the article.[2] We encourage authors to bring only one or two questions.

Author should also describe objectives of the research and offer the brief structure of the article.

Guidelines - Methodology

Author is encouraged to describe methodology clearly. Put it in a dedicated subchapter if necessary. This part should contain a brief justification for the research methods used.

This part should contain enough detail to enable the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of your methods and the reliability and validity of your findings.

How To Write Your Subchapters

[This is an example text]

Vivamus quis nisi ut diam vehicula mollis rhoncus et massa. Sed in sem felis. Nulla facilisi. Fusce lobortis vel nisl non viverra. Phasellus id molestie nunc.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nunc nunc ligula, volutpat et nibh sed, hendrerit tincidunt eros. Nam scelerisque rutrum nulla, nec tempus purus ultrices et. Maecenas lacus ligula, pharetra sit amet nibh eu, pellentesque efficitur ex. Integer varius leo eget eros dapibus, a venenatis nulla consectetur. Fusce finibus nisi maximus lorem cursus, a bibendum sem euismod. Vivamus ac

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[1] Fewer question or hypothesis is better, we encourage author to bring only 1-2 questions

[2] Footnote may be used to provide additional description (terms, concept, specific event, etc.) that might be too excessive to be included in-text.

tempor odio, in porta orci. Phasellus scelerisque

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<u>If You Have 2nd Level Subchapters, Use 12pt, Underline, Title Case</u>

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If You Have 3rd Level Subchapters, Use 12pt, Italic, Title Case. Run the text on after a punctuation mark. **[This is an example text]** In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Nunc in euismod libero, vel interdum lacus. Proin ut dignissim risus. Nunc faucibus libero sed eleifend bibendum. Nam mattis, odio ac placerat euismod, mauris felis consequat nunc, ut porttitor ligula risus ac nisl. Nulla ullamcorper sapien non quam gravida, nec dignissim ligula

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Guidelines - Conclusion

Conclusion is a brief summary of findings and discussion. It is strongly recommended to avoid mere repetitive statements or phrase from the previous section. Author may also discuss implication of the findings and point out prospect for further research.

Conclusion should followed by reference list format. Reference list is based on American Psychological Association (APA) style. Reference list should appear at the end of the article and include only literatures actually cited in the manuscript. Citation should be sorted alphabetically and chronologically, written in single spacing and 0pt before-after spacing format.

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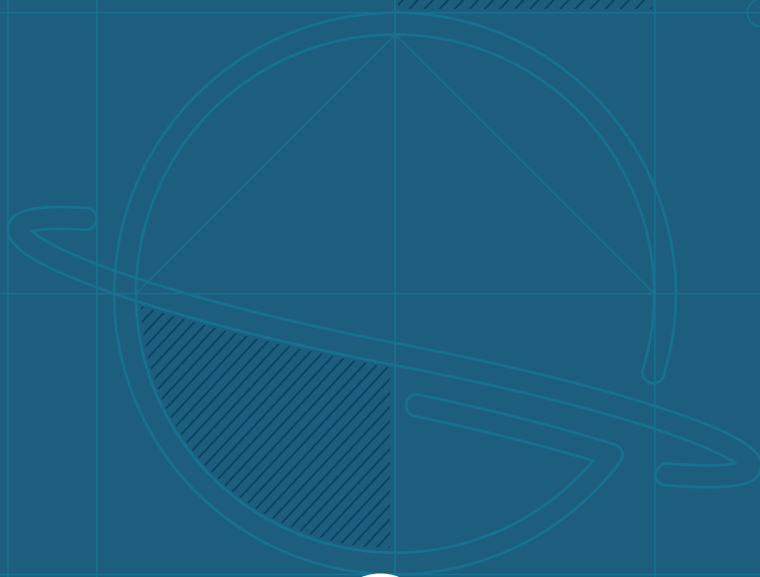**Audiovisual media (videos, music recordings, podcasts, etc.)**

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