

United Nations Historical Committee, Bandung Conference

Bandung Conference

Chairs: Zoe Nelson and Fiza Shaikh

Pre-and-Post Colonial Africa

Committee Overview

On April 18, 1955, key officials from 29 different countries will meet in Bandung, Indonesia to discuss the sovereignty and self-government of nations, equality of individuals, residual issues of colonialism, and non-interference. It will be presided over by Ruslan Abdulgani, a member of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hosted by Indonesia, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Myanmar (Burma), and Pakistan, the 24 additionally invited nations will almost exclusively be from Asia and Africa- representing roughly half of the world's population. Even the organization of this conference is an unprecedented amount of cooperation between Africa and Asia, and both citizens and leaders of countries are anxious to see if a solution to the problems put forth can be reached that is culturally sensitive to the citizens of both continents. During the estimated six day conference, the representatives are planning on structuring their ideas and core philosophies off of the pre-existing Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; a series of ideas listed in the 1954 Panchsheel Treaty between India and China. Essentially, these five principles are aimed at creating a peaceful atmosphere between the two aforementioned countries, by stating non-interference and non-aggression regarding the actions of the opposing country's government. Delegates at this conference must also consider how active of a physical, political, or military presence they wish to have in the conflict of the Cold War, as well as considering the impact that this decision will have with foreign powers, who could potentially help develop their infrastructure. This is a conference

where policy making and diplomacy are to be used to enforce goals, instead of the power of a military.¹

Controversy Surrounding the Conference

Several nations were purposely excluded from this conference, despite being located in the geographical areas that most other countries were invited from. These nations are North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, Israel, and South Africa. They were excluded over concern for their opinions; the rest of the colonies are all currently thought to be more or less in unison in terms of their ideas. The aforementioned countries are currently involved in controversy of various types and could throw off the desired unity.

There is also significant concern over the support that Soviet Russia and the People's Republic of China has expressed for the aims of this conference. Their support is understandable, as the root of communism has to do with equality, and equality is not granted in colonialism. However, this has worried western countries, especially the United States, who feel as if these two countries will make anti-western statements at the conference, which could in turn cause anti-western sentiment.

History of the Problem

A desire to extend trading routes, harvest raw materials, establish political dominance, and bring "civilization" and Christian ideals to the "dark continent" all spurred the so-called "Scramble for Africa." This was essentially a mad frenzy amongst European nations during the mid-19th century to colonize or govern portions of Africa. The Berlin Conference of 1884 made this possible, with different western nations laying claim to "spheres of influence" within Africa. This entailed European powers deciding amongst themselves to colonize and rule the majority of Africa; a

¹"Milestones: 1953-1960," U.S. Department of State Office of Historian, < <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/bandung-conf> >, (accessed 23 August 2014).

decision made without actually allowing African representatives to attend the conference. The majority of this land was distributed to Portugal, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, or France. Due to the results of this conference, roughly 110 million people within 30 different colonies became subjects of foreign rule.²

After this conference, many of these European nations attempted to make treaties with the local leaders of the area of Africa that they planned on occupying. Despite the fact that sizeable portions of these leaders agreed to these treaties, many of these leaders had misinterpreted the terms of the agreement to which they had signed. Instead of the diplomatic or economic treaty they thought they had agreed to, they soon realized that they had actually opened the door for foreign militaries and for European powers to reap the raw materials of the land, for profit. This caused a variety of uprisings; both in terms of formal military action, and guerilla warfare. One of the few semi-successful movements led by the rebels was the Igbo tribe's progress against the British in Nigeria.³ Although they were eventually beaten by the British, they still progressed further than most other rebels; usually, African dissidents stood no chance against the superior weapons and technology of the Europeans. Others leaders simply felt coerced into signing these treaties; intimidated by the strength, power, and technological advancement of these foreign powers. However, some leaders did knowingly agree to the treaties, with the rationale that it would boost the economy of their area.⁴

²H.J. de Blij, Peter O. Mullen, "The Scramble for Africa: Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 to Divide Africa," *Geography: Realms, Regions, and Concepts* (on-line), 2003, <<http://wysinger.homestead.com/berlinconference.html>>, (accessed 20 August 2014).

³Ehiedu E. G. Iweriebor, "The Colonization of Africa," Hunter College, <<http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-colonization-of-africa.html>>, (accessed 22 August 2014).

⁴"Unit Two: Studying Africa Through the Social Sciences," *Exploring Africa Web Journal*, <<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m7b/activity2.php>>, (accessed 21 August 2014).

There are several different reasons and ways that the various colonies were ruled. In some cases, companies were allowed to colonize Africa on behalf of their nations. This benefitted the ruling country in that they profited economically from increased trade and a wider variety of products, yet did not have to pay to set up the system of government or to cover other expenses. However, most of these companies were forced to turn over their power to Britain by the end of the nineteenth century. For instance, the British East Africa Company began ruling Kenya in 1888; five years later it was forced to return control of Kenya to Britain itself, both for political and economic reasons. The most common method of British rule was indirect rule. For this method, assigned local leaders were designated as "chiefs" and given the authority to rule over individuals in their assigned region, on behalf of a European nation. However, assigning a leader to a certain group of people posed difficulties. In some areas of Africa, only stateless societies existed, rather than tribes or formal governments. This proved problematic, because Britain had assumed that Africans would be either in tribes or in communities that would already have a default leader of some sort. In decentralized areas, this was not the case, and giving enormous amounts of power to individuals not used to being politically or socially significant caused some abuses of authority. It was also problematic because these "chiefs" were assigned to areas without the British taking into consideration the different languages and cultures already presiding there, and which might conflict with one another. By contrast, the French usually employed direct rule. This meant that they had Europeans directly ruling over their subjects within their colonies. They used the tactic of "divide and rule," exploiting the geographical, political, language, and social barriers of the people that they ruled to ensure that their power as the colonial force remained dominant. Finally, settlers sometimes

came over with the individual leaders of colonies, in what was called settler rule. This was most common in southern Africa.⁵

In all types of rules, and especially direct rule, Europeans tried to assimilate and Anglicize their African subjects. As mentioned above, one reason for colonization was the feeling of racial superiority, and the perceived need to “civilize” Africans, who were viewed as savage. This attitude is perfectly captured in Rudyard Kipling’s wildly popular 1899 poem, “The White Man’s Burden,” which asserts a duty for whites to civilize “your new-caught, sullen people/half-devil and half child”.⁶ Part of this assimilation was done through the spread of religion; 40% of Africans identified as Christians by the early 1900’s.⁷

The world was also affected colonial rule. For instance, after World War I, as part of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was forced to turn over its’ colonies to the League of Nations.⁸ This meant more power being given to certain countries, such as France and England. During World War II, American President Theodore Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the document “The Atlantic Charter”. This charter issued a variety of goals for a post-war world, including the self-government of nations; an idea that planted sparks of nationalism and hope for independence within the colonies of Allied Powers.⁹ However, it was Roosevelt that pushed for this aspect of the charter, and Churchill was displeased with this part of the charter’s vision.¹⁰ Additionally, many Africans also became disillusioned with the fact that they fought in World War II

⁵Ibid.

⁶Rudyard Kipling, “Modern History Sourcebook: Rudyard Kipling, the White Man’s Burden, 1899,” *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*, < <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kipling.asp> >, (accessed 20 August 2014).

⁷“Module Fourteen: Religion in Africa,” *Exploring Africa Web Journal*, < <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m14/activity4.php> >, (accessed 23 August 2014).

⁸“The Colonization of Africa.”

⁹“The Atlantic Charter and the Africans, August 14, 1941,” South African History Online, < <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/atlantic-charter-and-africans-august-14-1941> >, (accessed 22 August 2014).

¹⁰Ibid.

against the Axis Powers, supposedly against countries that were depriving humans of rights, yet they themselves were not able to experience true freedom under what they were assured was the “good” side of countries fighting.¹¹

Recent Resistance to Imperial Rule

Some of the resistance to imperialism has been passive-aggressive; subtle, day-to-day actions that attempt to undermine the authority of the imperial powers in question. There has also been economic resistance. From the 1920’s-1930’s, there were several unsuccessful attempts throughout Africa to have workers unionize and push for more rights.¹² Around this time period, farmers in Mali also managed to circumnavigate the rules on the production of cotton that their colonizers had set forth.¹³

Religion has been another point of conflict. In addition to early uprisings, African Independent Churches have sprung up around the continent; placing an emphasis on preaching equality, freedom, and justice.¹⁴

There have also been revolts as means of protesting colonial rule. One of the most famous of these revolts is the 1929 Aba Women’s War, a protest that occurred in Nigeria. This “war” was actually a series of riots spanning over several months, in which 25,000 Igbo women fought back against the restrictive policies of the British through both mocking songs and dances and physical

¹¹“Unit Two: Studying Africa Through the Social Sciences.”

¹²“Module 7B: African History, the Era of Global Encroachment,” African Studies Center, < <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m7b/activity4.php> >, (accessed 22 August 2014).

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

fighting. Roughly 100 people were either killed or injured during these riots when the British fired into a crowd, spurring outrage amongst African Citizens.¹⁵

Finally, tension has been rising in the form of organized leadership and organized opposition. Kwame Nkrumah is one such figure of leading importance in the independence movement. Already a member of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), Nkrumah recruited thousands of people to his organization, the Convention People's Party (CPP). They have since been instrumental in both rebellions and strikes.¹⁶ Another key figure in the independence movement is Jomo Kenyatta, who is working for Kenyan independence. He is responsible for helping to expand and lead the militant Mau Mau group against the British. A state of emergency was declared in 1952 as a result of Mau Mau's violence; thousands have been killed so far in uprisings against the British.¹⁷

Analysis of the Issue

For decades, nearly 90% of Africa has been under colonization by various European powers.¹⁸ Prior to this conference, less than five African Nations have been able to formally declare independence from their colonial rulers.¹⁹ Despite this low number, numerous nations have expressed their displeasure at being ruled by foreign powers. This issue is ongoing; even in the nineteenth century, there were numerous revolts and attempts at undermining power of the European rulers. Currently, rebellion is manifesting itself in a variety of ways; from organized groups going into revolt, to farmers that refuse to produce the amount of crops that they are required to.

¹⁵ "Aba Women's Riots (November-December 1929)," BlackPast, < <http://www.blackpast.org/gah/aba-womens-riots-november-december-1929> >, (accessed 20 August 2014).

¹⁶ "Case Study: Africa," BBC, < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/14chapter8.shtml> >, (accessed 22 August 2014).

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¹⁸ "Unit Two: Studying Africa Through the Social Sciences."

¹⁹ "Freedom From Empire: An Assessment of Postcolonial Africa: Year in Review 2010," Encyclopaedia Britannica, < <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1707631/Freedom-from-Empire-An-Assessment-of-Postcolonial-Africa-Year-In-Review-2010/296602/Other-developments> >, (accessed 22 August 2014).

Regardless of what is decided at this conference, it is clear that some sort of action needs to be taken.

All of the countries invited to this conference have an interest in the decolonization movement. However, not all countries, and not all individuals, share the same view on how this should be done. To some nations, it is enough to gradually break off ties with their former rulers, and even maintaining their economic ties with them. Others steadfastly refuse to take any other path than immediate emancipation from their colonizers. Each solution presents problems. If not enough ties are broken with colonial powers, those that are sympathetic to the independence movement might continue to revolt. Conversely, breaking off all ties to more powerful countries leaves the newly formed country vulnerable to attack or to a coup, where a dictator could come to power. The lack of infrastructure in a new nation also presents problems in terms of education, sanitation, housing, public works, and the governing of both local and international affairs.

Finally, it should be taken into account that these former powers may prove resistant to change. The fact that communist nations such as Soviet Russia and the People's Republic of China are supporting the goals of this conference has also put the adversaries of those countries on guard; several nations, especially the United States, are concerned that these two countries have the ability to spread anti-western sentiment amongst the countries at the conference.

The issues of non-interference, involvement in the Cold War, and decolonization need to be addressed in a way that satisfy a variety of different cultures, in a variety of geographical settings. The tension over decolonization has been building for decades, and chaos and revolutions could soon erupt if a solution is not reached soon. Regardless of how these issues are solved, it is clear that it will require diplomacy and dedication of all of the delegates involved- a solution needs to be reached, and it needs to be reached before any more violence or disorder can erupt.

Asia's Perspective on Post-Colonialism

To understand Asia's role in the Bandung Conference, Asia must first be defined. Historically, the term 'Asia' has been used from a Western perspective- a term used in context of an imperialist history. Asia has been the negative space of the West, always compared to the West in qualitative differences. As the historian Harry Harootunian said, "It has been one of the enduring ironies of the study of Asia that Asia itself, as an object, simply doesn't exist." Asia had been a land of colonies to Western powers before 1945- much of its modern standing in world politics developed in the Cold War. In 1955, at the time of the Bandung Conference, 15 independent nations went from Asia, including Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. For the purposes of the conference, any former colony on the Asian continent represents the perspective of Asia.

Each country attended the conference to represent matters in the interest of their own sovereignty, but unwittingly brought with them ideas and interests of their former colonial powers. The Bandung Conference, as the first major postcolonialism conference between Africa and Asia, strove for multilateralism, but often fell into European post-structuralism, or relying too heavily on the systems of government and organization that European powers had left in the countries they occupied.

The nation-states we know today originated mainly from the aftermath of World War II. After the war, when colonial troops fought alongside their Western powers against the Axis Powers, decolonization movements such as the 1941 Atlantic Charter gained momentum. Fighting against the Nazi ideology of fascism, many colonies found it hypocritical to return to a government under white supremacy. After the founding of the UN in 1945, many colonies pushed for independence. The difference between European countries and Afro-Asian countries is that after the war, the European countries had to adjust their foreign laws to the new expectations of international

government, namely the United Nations. However, the parts of Asia and Africa that were formerly under imperial rule did not even have their own government systems formed, let alone their foreign affairs.

The new dimension of international politics expected multilateralism, multiple countries working together on an issue. For example, 44 Allied nations negotiated monetary policy and rebuilt the international monetary system during World War II in the Bretton Woods conference. In the past, colonies of Allied powers had played a part in the Second World War, supplying arms, provisions, and soldiers, but they acted in the capacity of their imperial power.

The impetus for the Bandung Conference was the 1945 call for support for Indonesian sovereignty. The Bandung Conference represents the first major multilateral Afro-Asian cooperation initiative. From the beginning, the countries decided to proceed only with unanimous decisions, so no majority or power bloc could determine the results of the conference. European powers, especially those that colonized many of the Afro-Asian countries held the unanimity rule in high regard. The Bandung Conference has its roots in the meeting of Colombo Powers, between Communist China, India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Indonesia to outline their support for the latter country's push for independence. In the countries' desire for unanimity, they excluded countries that would cause violent controversies and virulent debate. Protection of their own homelands against threats to their newly realized sovereignty prioritized the debate for the first day.

As the date of the conference draws closer, keep in mind that each region desires support for their immediate struggles- for example, the Middle Eastern nations want to mobilize Afro-Asian opinion in support of their fight against Israel and France's crushing imperialism on Northern

Africa. India, on the other hand, wants the other countries to follow its example of neutrality between the East and West. China intends to put at rest fears of Western endangerment. Most of the countries will arrive at the conference newly freed from their colonial ties, but the economic and military ties still remain in several countries. Thus, their opinions could be influenced by the systems of government left in place by their former imperial powers. Russia and the United States are both excluded from the Conference in the interest of excluding ardent ideologies; however the countries invited represent all three frames of thought: pro-West, neutral, and Communist. As much as the Bandung organizers try to remain uninvolved, the Conference still echoes beliefs of the Cold War. The decisions of the Conference will require a great deal of compromise, because when the countries shed their colonial powers they did not lose their cultures, and now each represent a unique blend of Western and Afro/Asian thought. Delegates, please remember to prepare position papers. Also, keep in mind that you not only represent the ideals and perspective of your country, but the subtle colonial influences that continue to underlie many of their governments. The conference serves as a forum for your beliefs, but to plan and execute effective policies, you and your fellow attendees must compromise. As a delegate of the Bandung Conference, you represent a unique viewpoint- that the so-called "first world" should not have the final say in the futures of your countries.

Questions to consider

- Why were certain countries (Israel, North Korea, South Korea, South Africa and Taiwan) purposefully excluded from the Bandung Conference, even though they resided in areas that most other major countries were invited from? What tension or issues could this have created between countries? What issues rose as a result of it? Should these nations have been invited?
- What attributes should qualify a country as being “third world”? What, if any, are potential problems with terming a nation “third world”? What are better ways to classify and assist underdeveloped countries?
- What problems could manifest themselves in a country with little to no infrastructure and government? Would these problems be economic, political, or humanitarian? How could these problems be addressed?
- What are the similarities of the problems with colonialism and post-colonialism faced by Asia, versus faced by Africa? What are the similarities between them? What solutions would address the problems faced by each geographical area, while still being sensitive to the unique needs and cultures that each one has?
- Is it reasonable for foreign countries to act as a “guardian” over underdeveloped countries, and assist in establishing an infrastructure and temporarily protecting them, even if it potentially compromises the authority and sovereignty of the occupied nation?
- How, if at all, should the former colonial powers be addressed? Should business be done with them? Should they be allowed to help build the infrastructure of countries that they had formerly occupied, by way of retribution?
- If these countries should cease to be colonies, should their colonial powers pull out immediately or gradually? What are the pros and cons of each of these options? Should these former colonial powers be forced to pay reparations or assist the newly developing countries?

- Is violence ever justified as a means of changing unfair or harmful laws or practices? Are the rebels in countries currently revolting justified in using violence against those that have colonized their countries? What is the most effective way of making a political change?
- What do Soviet Russia and the People's Republic of China have to gain by encouraging the independence of African nations? Conversely, how will their encouragements for independence negatively affect western or democratic countries?
- What are potential problems with having so many countries attend this conference? What are potential benefits? Which countries are most likely to be allies, or least likely to be allies? Should the excluded countries have been invited? Should the colonial powers have been invited, in order to be formally addressed? How should decisions made at this conference be both announced and enforced?

Additional Resources

- http://ignca.nic.in/ks_41062.htm- The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are listed here, as well as details of the conference at which these principles were made. Since the Bandung Conference is expected to follow a similar format to this previous conference, this link may be helpful in preparing delegates for what to expect.
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/africa-through-a-lens-the-colonial-office-photo-collection> - This link provides access to thousands of different photos from the time period of colonial Africa. These pictures show both everyday life and working condition, allowing the viewers to get a mental image of what living under a foreign power was like.
- <http://www.the-map-as-history.com/maps/5-history-europe-colonization.php> - A variety of maps here show pre-colonial Africa, the effects of colonialism on the boundaries of individual countries in Africa, and how the overall borders within Africa changed during the late-19th through early-20th

centuries. This is useful to understand the changes within Africa, and to get a sense of the scale of colonialism.

- <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/08/02/independence.africa.colonialism> - This article provides an overview of colonialism in Africa, as well as a picture gallery of the conditions during colonialism.
- http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_16912.htm - A copy of the Atlantic Charter is included here. Since it helped to spark nationalism and to bring hope of a post-colonial world, it is helpful to read, especially when read with the mindset of a subject of a European Empire.

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