The Evolution of Norms: 
The Social Construction of Non-Interference in Asian Regionalism

Amitav Acharya

Introduction

On 23rd April 1955, speaking before a session of the Political Committee of the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, launched into a bitter denunciation regional defence arrangements being promoted by the US in Asia and the Middle East. Membership in pacts such as SEATO or CENTO, argued Nehru, rendered a country a “camp follower” and deprived it of its “freedom and dignity.” “It is an intolerable thought to me that the great countries of Asia and Africa should come out of bondage into freedom only to degrade themselves or humiliate themselves in this way.”1 Responding to Nehru’s attacks, Prime Minister Mohamed Ali of Pakistan, a member of both CENTO and SEATO, asserted that as “an independent sovereign nation”, Pakistan followed its “national interest”, did not feel it “necessary for us to justify our actions to anybody except to ourselves.”2 A more eloquent response to the Indian leader’s harsh words came the next day from Carlos Romulo, the lead delegate of the Philippines, a SEATO member. In a barely disguised dig at Nehru, Romulo urged his fellow participants to be “realistic and not be starry-eyed visionaries dreaming utopian dreams.” He reminded Nehru that as a smaller nation, the Philippines could not follow India’s path in renouncing collective defence to safeguard its newfound independence. Defending SEATO as a necessary guarantee against the

---

2 Mohamed Ali’s Speech in the Political Committee, 23 April 1955, Bandung Political Committee Proceedings.
growing menace of Communist interference in the domestic affairs of Asian states, he
issued a warning: “May your India, Sir, never be caught by the encircling gloom.”

This and other contestations at the Bandung Conference, and the larger empirical
and normative context in which they took place, should be of considerable importance to
contemporary scholars of sovereignty in international relations. They challenge the view
that sovereignty has been an “essentially uncontested concept”, and call for a more
complex understanding of how the norms of sovereignty came to be transmitted and
institutionalized in the Third World than is found in the available theoretical literature.

According to a generally accepted view, the “history of sovereignty is largely the
history of Westphalia’s geographic extension.” This extension was chiefly a by-product
of decolonization; indeed, the latter was “the achievement of sovereignty by dependent
states.” This view has largely been upheld by a more recent strand of scholarship which
questions the earlier literature’s emphasis on material forces (such as the physical
exhaustion of the West due to two world wars or the militant struggles carried out by
Third World national liberation struggles) in decolonization, and stresses the role of ideas
such as self-determination and equality in the normative delegitimation of imperialism
and the achievement of sovereignty by the dependent states. Moreover, both material
and ideational accounts agree that having helped secure the liberation of dependent
societies from colonial rule, sovereignty naturally formed the unquestioned core basis of
the new international society that the newly liberated states sought to promote. The Third

---

3 Ibid. Carlos Romulo, Meaning of Bandung, p.91.
Political Practice,” in R.B.J Walker and Saul H. Mendlovitz, eds. Contending Sovereignties: Redefining
Political Community (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990), p.159.
5 Daniel Philpott, “Westphalia, Authority and International Society”, in Robert Jackson, ed., Sovereignty at
7 Robert Jackson, “The Weight of Ideas in Decolonization: Normative Change in International Relations”,
in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. eds., Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and
Political Change (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp.111-138; Daniel Philpott, Revolutions in
Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
2001). According to Philpott: “For protesting colonists, the ideas were nationalism and equality, which they
translated into the demand for political independence, Westphalian statehood, for their colony. It was
through their reflection upon these ideas that a small stratum of educated, elite Africans, Asians, and Latin
Americans came to desire this statehood...It was then these converts to revolutionary ideas who exercised
the social power of protest...Aside from their efforts, the [pro-independence] parties would never have formed, the campaigns never would have taken place, and so on.” Philpott, Revolutions in Sovereignty,
p.191.
World states “took to Westphalian sovereignty like ducklings to water”.\(^8\) Robert Jackson, whose work stands out among the recent theoretical treatments of sovereignty for its special attention to the sovereignty regime in the Third World, shows that that the most important concern for Third World countries was to enjoy, develop and defend their “juridical” sovereignty, even in the absence of genuine “empirical” sovereignty. Jackson shows how the transmission of sovereignty to the Third World resulted in “a reversal of classical positive sovereignty in international relations” (based on national power and capacity to act independently and exercised through a balance of power system) and produced a shift towards “negative” sovereignty, defined as “freedom from outside interference”.

Non-intervention and sovereignty…are basically two sides of the same coin…Negative sovereignty…primarily involves decolonization: it is the distinctive liberty acquired by former colonies as a consequence of international enfranchisement movement…It is a formal-legal entitlement and therefore something which the international society is capable of conferring.\(^9\)

Reinforcing the nexus between sovereignty and decolonization, Jackson shows how the latter, spurred by a doctrine of “categorical self-determination”, and involving the dismantling of the entire colonial and trusteeship system, became the chief catalyst of the negative sovereignty regime in international relations.\(^10\) Once in place, this regime became “the sole successor to colonialism”, permitting no alternative institutional arrangement for the new states.\(^11\) The articulation of this new sovereignty regime was played out in the “North-South” domain; which came to exist side-by-side with the traditional East-West (US and the Soviet Union) positive sovereignty game (based on the traditional balance of power system).

In this essay, I concur that the shift to negative sovereignty built primarily around the non-interference norm was the principal feature of the “sovereignty game” after World War II. But I present a different understanding of the catalysts, actors, and

---

\(^10\) ibid., p.75.
\(^11\) ibid., p.198.
environmental conditions associated with the emergence of this regime. I advance three specific arguments. First, the emergence of the negative sovereignty regime was helped as much by newer norms against superpower intervention as by older norms promoting self-determination. The view that negative sovereignty was chiefly a by-product of, and was essentially accomplished by, decolonization, 12 misses the significant extent to which the new sovereignty regime was also shaped by Third World strategies for coping with superpower rivalry, including strategies of neutrality or non-alignment advocated by some of its leaders, strategies that had little to do with the norms of self-determination.

Second, in tracing the evolution of the new sovereignty regime, I stress the critical agency role of the “norm-takers”, i.e., the newly independent states. 13 This breaks with the hitherto emphasis in the norm diffusion literature (whether material or ideational) on the role of Western “norm givers”. The norms of negative sovereignty came about primarily through argument, discourse, debate and compromise in Third World forums. The dynamics of this contestation shows that the latter were not mere passive recipients, but active builders, contenders, interpreters and extenders of Westphalian norms. Part of this game of normative construction of the rules of sovereignty involved, as pointed out by Bull and Watson and Jackson, the broadening and further extension of sovereignty to varied areas, such as natural resources or even information flows. 14 But another aspect of this adaptive process involved fighting and settling intra-Third World contestations over which norms of sovereignty should assume precedence, as well as how sovereignty should and could be defended and upheld.

Closely related to the above, I argue that the development of the non-interference norm was as much the product of a South-South contestation as of a North-South one. The major disagreements and compromises about what constitutes non-interference and how it can be best defended took place within the Third World, rather than between the

14 “With the decline of Western dominance and the achievement and recovery of political independence by the societies of America, Asia, Africa and Oceania, it was the rules and institutions of European international society which they accepted as the basis of their international relations, even while seeking in some respects to modify them.” Bull and Watson, “Introduction”, in Bull and Watson, eds., The Expansion of International Society, p.2.
Third World and the North. For example, the importance of China in shaping the non-interference norm in Asia shows the problems of applying a “North-South” framework in explaining the negative sovereignty regime, since China had to be regarded as a part of either the “East” and the “South” (or both), but not the “North”.

Recent efforts to re-conceptualize sovereignty as a “social construct” has made an important advance on the “static” accounts of sovereignty in world politics. But much empirical work remains to be done in establishing how this process of “social construction” actually worked out key rules of sovereignty such as non-interference, especially in the context of the Third World. I build upon work that makes theoretical claims that the meaning of sovereignty is neither fixed nor constant, that the legitimacy of the rules of sovereignty is politically, rather than legally, determined, and that these rules are subject to changing interpretations, shaped by both changing material circumstances and social interactions among states. But unlike some earlier work of this genre, I highlight the role of Third World states in constructing the norms of sovereignty through interactions in the early post-war period.

Non-interference, the defining norm of the new sovereignty regime, was and remains far more of a contested political concept than a “legal-formal condition”. Though a Westphalian norm articulated in the 18th century and enshrined in the charter of the Latin American regional institutions and the UN, non-interference in the Third World had to be actively constructed and defended through argument, discourse and debate, not passively inherited from the “international enfranchisement movement” built around the

15 Here, I am accepting, rather than revisiting, a claim already made and accepted by newer scholars of sovereignty regarding the static nature of much of the older literature on sovereignty. See J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin, “The State and the Nation: Changing Norms and Rules of Sovereignty”, International Organization, vol.48, no.1 (Winter 1994), pp. 107-130; and Biersteker and Weber, State Sovereignty as a Social Construct. Both implicate realists (Morgenthau, Waltz, and Gilpin), and the latter also include writers from the English School such as Jackson, James and Hinsley among those offering essentially static accounts of sovereignty.

16 My work thus differs from two earlier contributions from the social constructionist literature. One, by Barkin and Cronin show the social construction of the rules of sovereignty by “winning coalitions” in major wars, while another stresses the role of material forces. See for example, the chapter by Inaytullah in Biersteker and Weber for a treatment of Third World sovereignty as a social construct, in which what is “social” focuses on dependency relationships. The key actors in my framework are “winners” in the decolonization battle, not in major wars, and its focuses on communicative action and social interaction.

self-determination idea. In this paper, I demonstrate how the norm of non-interference and non-intervention evolved through a series of contestations and compromises at a number of conferences held in Asia between 1947 and 1955. My research reveals that despite the universal appeal of the idea of sovereignty, there was considerable disagreement among Third World actors over interpretations of the norms of sovereignty, especially non-interference and equality, contestations which produced an enduring legacy in Asian international relations. Hence, while the metaphor of Third World states taking to sovereignty “as ducklings take to water”, may be true of the idea of sovereignty, it does not capture the contestations and compromises that produced its key behavioral norms such as non-interference in the Third World.

Apart from enriching the debate on Third World sovereignty, the paper also advances our understanding of Asian regionalism. These Asian and Afro-Asian conferences have received woefully inadequate attention and acknowledgement in contemporary writings about sovereignty. Major works of sovereignty tracing the

---

18 Jackson, *Quasi-States*. Jackson holds that the spread of the negative sovereignty regime begun in the mid-1950s and was completed by the late 1960s. This is an Afro-centric view. In this paper, I cover episodes between 1947 and 1955. The construction of sovereignty norms that I highlight had preceded the period identified by Jackson and contributed to the spread of the norms latter.

19 These include: The Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947; the Conference on Indonesia, New Delhi, 1949; The Conference of Southeast Asian Prime Ministers, Colombo, 1954; The Conference of Southeast Asian Prime Ministers, Bogor, 1954; and the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, 1955.

20 Norms make behavioral claims on actors that ideas do not. Ideas can be held privately, and may or may not have behavioral implications, while norms are always collective and behavioral. See Judith Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests, and American Trade Policy* (Ithaca: University Press, 1993). The idea of sovereignty is captured in Ruggie’s definition of it as “the institutionalization of public authority within mutually exclusive jurisdictional domains”. John Ruggie, “Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Towards a Neorealist Synthesis”, in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.143. Barkin and Cronin provide a useful definition of norms or “rules” of sovereignty: “a set of principles by which the international community recognizes the legitimacy of authoritative control over a specified population and territory.” Barkin and Cronin, "The State and the Nation”, p.108 (f.5).

“genealogy” and pathways of sovereignty have paid almost no attention to these Third World regional debates.\textsuperscript{22} In this paper, I seek to review the discourses about sovereignty and its norms with the help of the original documents of these conferences, including those previously ignored or unavailable, such as their verbatim and summary records and minutes culled together from archives in the USA, Indonesia and India.\textsuperscript{23} The practice of keeping such records has long since been discontinued in Asian regional meetings. There are very few writings on Asian international relations based on these proceedings, and these are entirely by area specialists uninterested in larger theoretical debates about sovereignty.\textsuperscript{24} Moreover, scholars of Asian diplomatic history have tended to view these conferences in isolation from each other, rather than as part of an evolving and interrelated process.\textsuperscript{25} There exists no theoretical work on the origins and evolution of regional norms in post-war Asia, or work on Asian international relations which looks beyond great power geopolitics and identifies ideational and normative forces shaping it.


\textsuperscript{23} This essay and the larger project it is part of is based on the author’s collection of the verbatim and summary records and minutes of the proceedings of all the relevant conferences, including the ARC, Baguio, Colombo, Bogor and the Bandung Conferences. This project relies chiefly on these rare Asian records, rather than the more common practice of relying on Western archives (such as declassified material from the British Foreign Office or Commonwealth Office records). This has been supplemented by a lengthy personal interview with Roselan Abdulghani, the Secretary-General of the Bandung Conference, especially to elaborate on and clarify points made in the latter’s own invaluable writings: \textit{The Bandung Connection: The Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955} (Jakarta: Gunung Agung (S) Pte/ Ltd., 1981); and \textit{The Bandung Spirit} (Jakarta: Prapantja, 1964).

\textsuperscript{24} Kahin seems to be the only scholar of the Bandung conference to have had access to the records of the proceedings of the Conference’s Political Committee. But his own short book (38 pages) shows no reliance on materials of the previous Bogor and Colombo conferences (some of these would have been unavailable to him?); neither did he have access to the speeches made in the closed meetings of the Political Committee (which were separate from the summaries which he had obtained) except for a 24 hour period, during which he managed to copy brief extracts in his own handwriting. The present author has obtained and consulted the entire Bandung proceedings.

\textsuperscript{25} The exception is the work of the journalist George Jansen, \textit{Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment}. 
Yet, there are important reasons to undertake such a study by examining these Asian and Asian-African conferences as a package and incorporate their normative discourses into the theoretical literature on sovereignty. On the one hand, they explain why Asia “failed” to develop a durable regional organization in the post-war period, in marked contrast to other parts of the Third World, notably Africa and the Middle East. Yet, this outcome “succeeded” in shaping an influential normative framework for Asian regionalism.

With the benefit of hindsight, this paper points to two areas in which the Asian regional gatherings, especially Bandung, had their major impact. The first was their role in delegitimizing great power military pacts, especially SEATO. The second was their role in shaping the process and design of Asian institution-building in a later era. These outcomes upheld and extended the notion of non-interference. They support claims by norm theorists about the importance of norms in shaping behavior of international actors, even in the absence of formal institutions.

**The Pathway of Sovereignty: Constructing Non-interference**

In developing my argument about the “social construction” of sovereignty,26 I trace and compare discourses about norms between the ARC in 1947 and Bandung in 1955. A comparison of the two conferences (as well as the New Delhi Conference of Indonesia in 1949 and the two Colombo Powers meetings in 1954 which led to the Bandung Conference) shows that the non-interference norm was not of primary importance in 1947, but steadily grew in significance as we move towards the Bandung conference.

Although the ARC and Bandung Conferences were similar in many respects in terms of their objectives, and had many of the same participants, there were also important differences. The ARC was organized on a non-official basis (similar to what is called Track-II today) by a Delhi think tank, the Indian Council of World Affairs. Bandung was an official gathering of sovereign nations. More importantly, ARC, unlike

---

26 My “social constructivist” framework focuses on “the ways the meaning of sovereignty is negotiated out of interactions within intersubjectively identifiable communities”, Biersteker and Weber, “The Social Construction of State Sovereignty” in their *State Sovereignty as a Social Construct*, p.11. But the key
Bandung, did not address “political” issues. The ARC focused on colonialism and self-determination, while Bandung focused on Cold War issues such as military alliances and non-intervention.

A common view of the ARC is that it avoided political issues and focused on non-political ones. The Secretary-General of the ICWA at the time of the ARC, A. Appadorai, noted that non-political topics were “the favourties” for the ARC because several participating countries, such as Burma and Indonesia, were yet to be independent. The agenda of the ARC reflected this: it covered eight issues: National Movements for Freedom, Racial Problems, Inter-Asian Migration, Transition from Colonial to National Economy, Agricultural Reconstruction and Industrial Development, Labour Problems and Social Services, Cultural Problems, and Status of Women and Women’s Movements.27

Yet, the ARC did reach “consensus” on a set of norms over political issues. These included an agreement not to provide any assistance for the continuance of “foreign domination” in any part of Asia, and the provision of assistance to national movements wherever possible. A third norm was that “people belonging to one country and living in another should identify themselves with the latter”.28 It extracted assurances from countries such as India, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Burma that their existing or proposed constitutions would not contain any provision for discrimination on racial grounds. The norm of equality between all citizens and irrespective of race and creed “should be the rule in all countries.” The norm of equality was divided into four components: (i) complete legal equality of all citizens; (ii) complete religious freedom; (iii) no public social disqualification of any racial group; and (iv) equality before law of persons of foreign origin who had settled in the country.”29

A striking aspect of many of these “rules” was that despite being concerned with the domestic jurisdiction of states, they could be regarded as unexceptional and a “consensus” could be reached over them. Perhaps the “non-official” (in theory, if not in interactions I focus on are discursive, rather than practical; in my framework, the two are regarded as mutually-constitutive and discourse is taken as a form of practice.

28 Ibid., p.279.
29 Ibid., p.280.
practice) nature of the ARC made this possible, along with the fact that several of the participants at the ARC had not yet reached sovereign statehood. The ARC was about establishing self-determination and defending sovereignty. Inspired by a common opposition to colonialism, agreement could be possible even over domestic norms. It would not take long before the mere mention of internal racial issues in countries at a regional forum in Asia would be construed as a flagrant violation of sovereignty. In 1947, however, mutual non-interference was not the focus of the Third World’s political agenda. The importance of non-interference, would grow alongside the escalation of the Cold War following the communist takeover in China in 1949. In 1947, however, the participants in the ARC were not so much concerned with defining the rules of their mutual interaction (a South-South issue) as with demanding self-determination and racial equality from the West (a North-South issue).

While the ARC and the 1949 Conference on Indonesia (also held in Delhi) focused on promoting self-determination and the West’s relations with its colonies and ex-colonies, subsequent Asian conferences, such as the Colombo Powers’ meetings in Colombo and Bogor and the Bandung Conference of 1955, would be concerned primarily with the question of how to regulate relations among the new states in the context of their twin fears of communist Chinese interference and superpower rivalry. While the ARC’s goal was to win freedom, Bandung’s goal, in Romulo partisan words, was to “preserve” it “against all threats, including the threat posed by the new and sinister imperialism of world communism.”30 As the official report of the Arab League delegation would later put it, to bring about an “agreement on general principles” was “the basic aim’ of Bandung Conference.31 Roselan Abdulghani, the Secretary-General of the Bandung Conference, saw the purpose of the Conference as not only being: “to continue the struggle toward a full materialization of national independence”; but also “to determine…the standards and procedures of present-day international relations.”32 The later objective was also described by him as “the formulation and establishment of certain norms for the conduct of present-day international relations and the instruments for the

31 Arab League Report on Bandung, p.23.
practical application of these norms.”

Hence, the participants in Bandung would regard the Declaration on World Peace as a “most important resolution”, because it “upheld the principles regulating their relations with each other and the world at large.”

The new emphasis on defining rules of conduct in intra-regional relations reflected the pressures facing Asian leaders owing to changing geopolitical circumstances. Three changes are noteworthy. First, the communist revolution in China had raised fears of communist interference in the internal affairs of pro-Western states. Second, following the Korean War, the US had become noticeably more interested in a Pacific regional alliance, in marked contrast to its pre-1950s attitude when it had refused to support regional groupings in Asia out of deference to Asian nationalists who would have viewed such efforts as a form of neo-colonialism. Third, the Cold War ideological polarization was becoming sharper in Asia, especially with the growing crisis in Indo-China, with the US stepping up support for the beleaguered French.

As such, non-interference emerged as the key norm of Asian regionalist efforts. Faced with an escalating crisis in Indo-China, the Prime Ministers of the five participating countries, India, Pakistan, Burma, Indonesia and Ceylon, organized themselves into a group known as the Colombo Powers, and held their first meeting in April 1954 in Colombo. In proposing the terms of a settlement in Indo-China, the drafting committee of the Colombo Conference, prodded by India and Burma, suggested “a solemn agreement of non-intervention” by the USA, USSR, UK, and China “to refrain from giving aid to the combatants or intervening in Indo-China with troops or war material” as a specific clause in a draft joint communiqué to be issued by the Colombo Powers.

Pakistan, while not being “opposed to the principle of non-intervention”, objected to the inclusion of the language (presumably because that would have delegitimized US assistance to South Vietnam at a time when Pakistan had decided to join a collective defence pact with the US). In the end, softer language was found which urged the outside powers, China, USA, USSR and UK, to agree on “steps necessary to

---

35 *Southeast Asian Prime Ministers’ Conference: Minutes of Meetings and Documents of the Conference, Colombo, April 1954* (Hereafter cited as *The Colombo Conference Minutes*).
prevent the recurrence or resumption of hostilities” so that “the success of…direct negotiations [as opposed to the prospects for a ceasefire] will be greatly helped.”

It was at this Colombo meeting that the idea of an Asia-Africa Conference was proposed by Indonesia to be held under the sponsorship of the Colombo Powers. The final preparations for the Conference was made in a second meeting of the Colombo Powers held in Bogor, Indonesia in December 1954. The objectives of the Asian-African gathering would be to consider of the “problems affecting national sovereignty and racialism and colonialism”; “to explore and advance” the “mutual and common interests” of Asian and African nations; and “establish and further friendliness and neighbourly relations.” The principle of non-interference was advanced in three key decisions of the Colombo Powers at Bogor. The first was their position that “acceptance of the invitation by any one country would in no way involve or imply any change in the status of that country or its relationship with other countries.” Secondly, they recognized the “principle that the form of government and the way of life of any one country should in no way be subject to interference by any other.” Third, Nehru successfully opposed the idea, mooted by Indonesia, to issue invitations to representatives of independence movements in dependent countries, because “that would mean an interference in internal affairs, while the Colombo countries had advocated the principle of non-interference.”

Sovereignty (especially what constitutes the most urgent threats to it and how best to protect it) held the center stage of debates at the Bandung Conference. At one level, its participants were “united behind one simple idea – the idea of national independence.” But at another level, they disagreed sharply over how to organize their relationships and develop rules of conduct to defend their political independence and dignity from encroachment by others, including their fellow participants. A review of the debates of the closed sessions of the Political Committee shows that self-determination issues, such as in Africa, Palestine and West Irian, attracted less passion and preoccupied the leaders to a much less extent than intra-mural debates about non-interference and non-

---

36 The Colombo Conference Minutes.
37 “Joint Communique by the Prime Ministers of Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan”, in Conference of the Prime Ministers of the Five Colombo Countries, Bogor December 1954, Minutes of Meetings and Documents of the Conference, (Hereafter Cited as The Bogor Conference Minutes).
38 The Bogor Conference Minutes, First Session, p.6.
involvement (in regional pacts). The principal players in this debate were the Colombo Powers themselves and those neighbours of China most concerned about communist interference.

Bandung’s agenda was much broader and much more political in nature than that of the ARC. As with the ARC, it included self-determination, including Palestine and racialism. But Bandung also focused on human rights, and “World Peace and World Cooperation”, which were not discussed as such in Delhi in 1947. The key issue at Bandung was non-interference. This was a time when “the word and the idea of intervention was everywhere, especially in Southeast Asia.” The main culprits were not just the US and the USSR; China was also being implicated, not because of its overt military intervention, but because of its alleged sponsorship in subtler forms of interference through its official and non-official relationships with, and support for, communist movements in Southeast Asia.

It was the issue of Chinese interference which produced one of the great dramas of the Conference, sparked by Ceylonese Prime Minister John Kotelawala’s attack on communism as a second and newer form of colonialism. Referring to “those satellite states under Communist Domination in Central and Eastern Europe”, Kotelawala asked that “if we are in opposition to colonialism, should it not be our duty to openly declare opposition to Soviet colonialism as much as to Western imperialism?” Kotelawala’s anger against communist colonialism was believed to have been induced by his failure to elicit a pledge from Chou En-Lai to stop Cominform propaganda and Chinese assistance to communists at home. The view of communism as a new form of colonialism was shared by Iraq, Turkey, and on a more moderate tone, the Philippines.

On the other side was Nehru. Nehru took Kotelawala’s attack on communism as a challenge to the sovereign status of East European states. In refuting Kotelawala’s view, Nehru affirmed a legalistic view of sovereignty in international relations. “There is a distinct and great difference in criticizing the very basis of independent nations that are represented in the United Nations and with whom we have diplomatic relations…and our

---

40 This made Arab and African representatives less than satisfied with Bandung, and might have contributed to their lack of enthusiasm for a permanent Asian-African regional organization.
41 ibid, p.63.
42 Bandung Political Committee Proceedings.
talking about Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia”, because the latter were “represented in the UN by the colonial powers”, while the East European countries were “represented directly at the UN by their own representatives.”

On the issue of non-interference, Nehru argued that non-interference in the domestic affairs of its neighbours, could not be pursued in isolation from non-intervention by superpowers in regional conflicts. It should be noted that in the speeches of the Asian and African leaders, the distinction between the two was less than clear - some leaders tended to use non-interference and non-intervention interchangeably. But there was a evident gap between those like Sri Lanka concerned primarily with communist interference and those like Nehru concerned more with superpower intervention through regional pacts.

This episode underscores a clear divide among key leaders at Bandung regarding the relative importance of non-interference (by outside powers, especially China, in the domestic affairs of states) versus non-intervention (by outside powers in regional conflicts in support of Cold War ideological objectives). The former took a narrower view of sovereignty and stressed the importance of non-interference on its own right, without linking it with the issue of superpower intervention. It would be misleading to describe this group as “pro-Western” because it included such neutrals as Burma and Sri Lanka, both of whom had turned down invitations to join SEATO. Pakistan, a SEATO member, was not concerned with Chinese subversion; its main reason for joining the Pact was its rivalry with India over Kashmir.

Nehru believed that the non-interference in the internal affairs of states could not be achieved without ensuring the non-intervention of the superpowers in regional conflicts. And the latter, he argued, is best achieved through the non-involvement of Third World states in superpower-led regional pacts. This does not mean that he was

43 Speech to the Closed Session of the Bandung Conference, 22 April 1955, Bandung Political Committee Proceedings.
44 Some leaders at Bandung tended to use “interference” and “intervention” interchangeably. Support from outside powers, including China, US, USSR and Britain, to the two Vietnamese sides in the Indo-China conflict through supply of arms was described both as “interference” and “intervention”. Chinese support for communist insurgencies was generally referred to as “interference”. The neutralists led by Nehru were more concerned with “intervention”, while the pro-Western camp led by Pakistan, Philippines, Iraq and Turkey was more worried about “interference”, as revealed from the terms used by their representatives in the closed sessions of the Bandung conference. Sri Lanka, an anti-communist regime which had stayed away from SEATO, attacked Chinese interference, while Nehru dismissed the threat of Chinese subversion as a danger to Asian stability.
unconcerned with the non-interference issue (especially in relation to China). But Nehru was dealing with this problem through a policy of “engagement” of China which he was already carrying out through his Five Principles approach. Underlying his approach was a belief that if China were to be left alone, it would focus on its own economic development, and would be less likely to interfere in the internal affairs of its neighbours. He believed that this policy was already yielding dividends and that the threat of further Chinese interference was somewhat exaggerated. Pacts such as SEATO, on the other hand, were clearly directed against China and would provoke Beijing into a more interfering posture.

45 Low, Struggle for Asia, pp.214-215. Prior to the Conference, India and China had signed the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence: Mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; (2) mutual non-aggression; (3) Mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; (4) Equality and mutual benefit; (5) Peaceful co-existence.
In attacking regional defence pacts such as CENTO and SEATO, Nehru defended himself against the charge of being a “starry-eyed” idealist. Far from being a pacifist, he claimed to be “taking a realistic view” of the dangers involved in the regional pacts. At the same time, he derided the “so-called realistic appreciation of the world situation”, expressed by CENTO member Turkey in defence of regional pacts, as being responsible for world tension and conflict. Incidentally, Nehru himself was not against any kind of defence cooperation. In 1945, he himself had envisaged a “close union of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean for defence and trade purposes.” Later, he had shown as not being opposed to bilateral defence ties between states, including Third World countries and outside powers, because these were needed for legitimate national defence against overt aggression. But regional pacts conceived in the Cold War were viewed by him in an entirely different light. First, they were an affront to the political independence of new states.

NATO was bitterly condemned by Nehru at Bandung as “one of the most powerful protectors of colonialism” (showing his anger over pressures from some European members of NATO to leave Portugal alone in Goa). But even NATO did not go as far as SEATO. At Bogor, Nehru had pointed out how SEATO brought about

“quite a new conception”, because unlike NATO, “members of this organization are not only responsible for their own defense but also for that of areas they may designate outside of it if they so agree, this would mean creating a new form of spheres of influence.” Nehru contrasted it with the Geneva Agreement on Indo-China, which he endorsed “because of its clause that no outside interference will be allowed in Indo-China”.

In venting his bitter opposition to regional defence pacts and furthering his doctrine of non-involvement (at this time, Nehru was being described as the leader of the “neutralists”, this being the prevailing description for his policy of “non-involvement”,

---

46 Nehru, Speech at the Political Committee, 23 April 1955, Bandung Political Committee Proceedings.
47 Nehru, Speech at the Political Committee, 23rd April 1955, Bandung Political Committee Proceedings
48 Extracts from Nehru’s Interview with B. Shiva Rao, ICWA ARC Files.
49 Bandung Political Committee Proceedings.
which later acquired prominence as “non-alignment”), Nehru believed that the proliferation of regional pacts would reduce the “area of peace” and encourage great power interference and intervention in the internal affairs of the new states. For him, the sanctity of the non-interference norm was closely linked to the non-involvement of states in superpower rivalry through membership in regional pacts. Nehru’s position of pacts was closely based on a logic of sovereignty that acknowledged the salience of non-interference (which he used interchangeably with non-intervention). Unlike his detractors at Bandung, such as Romulo, who offered the most eloquent defence of the pacts at the Conference, he too was arguing (at least, so he believed) from a logic of sovereignty. But Nehru believed that pacts did more harm than good to non-interference, and that the latter as a principle would be best pursued through agreements such as his Five Principles deal with China. The key objective of Bandung, in Nehru’s view, should be to expand the “area of peace” in the face of the escalating Cold War by eschewing any temptation to join regional pacts with the superpowers. The challenge of developing norms about mutual non-interference among the Asian countries was best left to bilateral agreements among the Asian countries (some had called it Locarno-style agreements), such as the India-China Five Principles (Panchaseel) framework.

Advocates of the regional pacts contended that these were necessary against the threat of communist interference. As Romulo pointed out, the communists were routinely violating their own professed doctrine of non-interference. For the pro-pact group, the key challenge to the sovereignty of the new states was communist subversion and infiltration. They defended SEATO as the first pact to cover such threats. They also argued that the pact could not violate the doctrine, since it required the consent of the party concerned before its mutual assistance provisions could be activated. Nehru’s position on pacts expectedly invited Pakistan’s ire; its Prime Minister, Mohammed Ali, took Nehru’s comment about the “camp followers” “degrading” and “humiliating” themselves as an affront to its sovereignty. Nehru had not actually argued that

---

51 A popular misconception about Nehru’s role in Bandung is that he tried to impose the Five Principles; but a careful reading of the minutes of the conference shows that nowhere did he urge its formal adoption. He did bitterly oppose Pakistan’s effort to add a principle recognizing “the right of self-defence exercised singly or collectively” as a ploy to legitimize its membership in SEATO. The proposal to adopt the Five
membership in regional pacts implied a loss of “sovereignty”, but one could interpret his criticism as an argument that Pakistan’s decision to enter into regional pacts undermined its moral and substantive, if not legal, claim to sovereignty, and challenged the principle of equality – itself a basic norm of sovereignty - since the pacts were manifestly “unequal” (as explicitly argued by Nehru). In any case, the Pakistani premier left no doubt that he viewed Nehru’s criticism of the pacts in view of Pakistan’s sovereign status. Pakistan’s membership in regional pacts, far from undermining it, was a reaffirmation that Pakistan remained “an independent sovereign state” and as such had the right to do whatever was needed for its own security.

The Bandung Conference resolved its two major points of debate through a series of compromises. On the first question of communism being a new form of colonialism, it declared that “colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should be brought to an end.” The shift from “colonialism in all its forms” to “colonialism in all its manifestations” satisfied China, which interpreted it to mean not the existence of two forms of colonialism (western and communist), but of “colonialism in its political, military, economic, cultural and social manifestations.” 

On the second issue, relating to the legitimacy of pacts, the compromise arrived at Bandung was best reflected in the language of the Ten Principles adopted as part of its final Communique. As noted, Burma recommended the Five Principles as the basis for a Bandung declaration. But disagreement arose over the term “peaceful co-existence” which was opposed by the anti-communist camp which saw in it a ploy for legitimizing communist hypocrisy. In the end, “peaceful co-existence” failed to appear in the list, replaced by “to live together in peace with one another.”

Second, Pakistan offered a list of seven principles of its own, of which three: respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and non-aggression, were to be found in the Five Principles, but added four more: right to self-determination, equality of all nations, the peaceful settlement of international disputes and most importantly, “the right of self-defence exercised singly or collectively”. Nehru, as mentioned earlier, objected to the latter, claiming that it “covered” Pakistan’s membership in Cold War

---

Principles to adopt; this was done on by U Nu of Burma, not by Nehru and there is no evidence to suggest that U Nu was acting as a surrogate for Nehru. Burma itself had accepted the Five Principles.

52 Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference, 24 April 1855.
Pacts. In the end, the Bandung Declaration offered Ten Principles. The fifth of these allowed collective defence, but a sub-clause to this principle urged the “abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers.”

**Did Norms Matter: Power Versus Legitimacy in Asian Regionalism**

Bandung legitimized and expanded the negative sovereignty regime in fundamental ways. First, it highlighted the danger of communist interference, which was a genuine concern for some leaders (including leaders committed to democracy and human rights, rather than narrow concerns about regime security). Second, while the right of collective defence was upheld as a sovereign right, but in so far as it sanctioned membership in pacts such as SEATO, and enhanced the danger of Chinese subversion (a threat to the non-interference doctrine), it was given conditional approval. Third, the context of non-interference was broadened beyond its initial association with self-determination, and was linked to the broader and newer context of non-involvement in superpower rivalry. The conference produced an expanded conception of what constituted challenges to sovereignty and non-interference, which included superpower intervention in regional conflicts even with the consent of parties and even some recognition that membership in unequal pacts could undermine the sovereign status of the newly independent states. Through his critique of regional pacts, which produced the compromise injunction against collective defence arrangements serving “the particularistic interests” of great powers, Nehru constructed the link between non-interference and non-intervention.

In examining the importance of Bandung in establishing negative sovereignty, one must take into account the argument that the norm had already been enshrined in the UN charter and that the regional meetings were simply repeating well-known platitudes. Bandung affirmed the place of the UN as the key arbiter of sovereign status, as seen from Nehru’s invoking of UN representation of East European states to dismiss Kotelawala’s thesis regarding a new form of colonialism in Eastern Europe. However participants at Bandung also felt that while the UN was important, it could not defend the norms of sovereignty sufficiently. This criticism not only came from just true of advocates of
pacts like Romulo, who felt the UN did not have teeth, but also from champions from the neutralist camp. Thus, a group of the latter wanted the conference to pass a resolution to acknowledge that the UN had not done enough to address the issue of West Irian, although this was later dropped. Moreover, many participants at the Asian meetings such as Ceylon, were not members of the UN and their membership, a key demand of Asian conferences as will be seen later, was by no means assured. While non-interference was a “universal” norm enshrined in the UN charter, its diffusion and development required the advocacy and support of regional conferences, underscoring the importance of a “social construction” perspective.

Most assessments of Bandung agreed that it was more successful in “establishing the new status of Asian and African nations in international politics and their claim to a place in the counsels of the nations” than in handling “concrete problems of contemporary international relations.”\(^{54}\) Kahin concluded that “the Conference’s major achievements were not…to be found in its formal resolutions. More important was its educational function - the attainment by the representatives…of a much fuller and more realistic understanding of one another’s point of view.”\(^{55}\) Other commentators hailed the fact of the conference being held at all as its most important achievement. A more specific claim was that the conference helped to diffuse world tensions, especially in view of Chou’s offer of direct talks with the US over Formosa (although the US did not take up the offer).

These assessments, made in the immediate aftermath of Bandung, could not have foreseen its longer term effects, one of which would be to challenge Romulo’s own assessment that the pro-West camp came out victorious at Bandung: “It is no exaggeration that the anti-communist states put both communism and neutralism on the defensive, scoring a signal diplomatic triumph for the free world”\(^{56}\). This triumph, however, did not translate into vitality and longevity for the military alliance, SEATO. Guy Pauker describes the “injunction” against the “use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particularistic interests of any of the big powers” as “most significant

aspect” of the conference.\textsuperscript{57} The injunction and the divisions among the Colombo Powers which produced it, had much to do with the delegitimation of SEATO.

SEATO’s problems and eventual demise had as much, if not more, to do with lack of legitimacy than teeth. To be sure, as an alliance, SEATO was quite different from NATO; it had no permanent military command, no automatic US commitment (the later was subject to its “constitutional processes”), and no guarantee of action, only consultations. Even in the case of overt aggression, the powers could act only at the invitation and with the consent of the government concerned. Unlike the NATO formula of “attack on one, attack on all”, SEATO adopted the Monroe Doctrine formula, applied to OAS, under which the parties merely recognize that an armed attack in the treaty area “would endanger its own peace and safety.” But these limitations were not particularly worrisome to its members. “The possibility of the United States not acting at all because of the limitations imposed by these two formulae was not a source of serious apprehension in the United Kingdom, New Zealand or Australia.”\textsuperscript{58} Dulles himself had assured that the provision regarding constitutional processes “gives all the freedom of action and power to act that is contained in NATO.”\textsuperscript{59} Furthermore, the absence of a NATO-like structure was not considered too debilitating “so long as the use of a mobile, striking force in the area rather than massive land forces is contemplated.” \textsuperscript{60}

The non-participation of the Colombo Powers - India, Burma and Indonesia (especially the former), and the controversy over pacts at Bandung, did more damage to SEATO. Prior to Bandung, the negative attitude of the key Colombo Powers affected British support for a collective defence system in Southeast Asia. Before the Geneva Conference on Indo-China in 1954, Anthony Eden had communicated to Dulles his wish that they “should avoid taking any action which might lead the Governments represented at Colombo to come out publicly against our security proposals.” \textsuperscript{61} According to a Joint US-UK Study Group Report, the British members of the group believed that “strong efforts to secure the participation of the Colombo Powers in the collective security

\textsuperscript{57} Pauker, \textit{The Bandung Conference}, p.18.
\textsuperscript{59} Cited, ibid., p.329.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, p.338.
arrangement or at least their acquiescence in its formation should be made prior to the negotiation of the treaty.”

The absence of Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Minister, from the SEATO Conference in Baguio, Philippines, in September 1954, was officially explained as due to the situation caused by the French rejection of the European Defence Community, but there remained feelings that “Sir Anthony was not keen to attend owing to the [negative] attitude of India and Ceylon” towards the Treaty. During his meeting in London with Dulles, Eden had proclaimed that “without their understanding and support, no permanent South-east Asia defence organization could be fully effective.”

Analyzing the reasons for its collapse, a former Secretary-General of SEATO stresses its failure “to gather new members”, and the “ironical” fact that “it was Thailand and the Philippines whose security SEATO was principally conceived to ensure, who asked…for its gradual phasing out…” Echoing Nehru’s point about unequal alliances, he acknowledged: “When membership is disparate and composed of great and small nations, the latter having to rely heavily on the former, the organization is bound to be at the mercy of the whip and whim of the larger nations.” Also significant is the fact that the Association of Southeast Asia, formed by Thailand, Philippines and Malaysia in 1961, and which was a clear precursor to ASEAN, noted in its founding declaration that the organization was “in no way connected with any outside power block and was directed against no other country,” a clear reference to the demonstrated illegitimacy of SEATO.

The “Bandung injunction” influenced the making and agenda of ASEAN, the most successful experiment in regionalism within Asia. During negotiations leading to the formation of ASEAN in 1967, Indonesia sought to incorporate the Bandung language committing members against pacts that serve “the particularistic interests” of great powers. While this specific language was eventually dropped, the Bangkok Declaration expresses itself against multilateral defence pacts and calls upon ASEAN members to

---

64 Low, *Struggle for Asia*, p.213.
65 Konthi Suphamongkon, “From SEATO to ASEAN”, undated, pp.32-35.
“ensure their stability and security from external interference in any form or manifestation” (thereby linking intra-mural non-interference with non-intervention by outside powers). ASEAN’s Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Declaration of 27 November 1997 affirms “the continuing validity of the ‘Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation’ of the Bandung Conference of 1955, which among others, enunciates the principles by which states may co-exist peacefully.” It also affirms both the principle of non-interference as a defining norm for ASEAN’s intra-mural and external relations. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of 1975 also acknowledges that ASEAN’s goals are “consistent with” the “Ten Principles adopted by the Asian-African Conference in Bandung”. Furthermore, ASEAN has rejected any proposals to develop into a military alliance; and its norms against multilateral defence and security cooperation (whether intra-ASEAN or with any outside power) survived the Vietnamese challenge in the 1980s. Non-interference remains the critical norm of ASEAN, “the key factor as to why no military conflict had broken out between any two member states since 1967.”

Shaping Institution-Design and Process

The second longer-term impact of the Asian and Asian-African conferences in constructing the norms of sovereignty concerns the rules of procedure and design of regional institutions in Asia developed since the 1960s. Weak institutionalization of regional organizations is a key indicator of negative sovereignty. While widely seen as an integral and deliberate part of the “ASEAN Way”, the genesis of Asian under-institutionalization could be traced to the ARC. The sponsors of the non-official ARC considered two schemes for a regional organization. The first called for “a permanent Institution meeting once in three years in an Asian country” whose purpose would be to facilitate “exchange of ideas and cultivation of personal contacts between Asian thinkers and public workers.” The other scheme would be to set up a “new central organization” that would function by collecting and disseminating information, conducting study and

---

research, holding periodic conferences, fostering cultural and social contacts between Asian countries. The latter body would deal with peace and security issues, and was to be governed by an Asian Council consisting of two representatives from each constituent national unit. The Asian Council was to meet twice a year and its resolution was to be determined by a majority voting (rather than consensus). The institution that emerged resembled the second scheme, i.e., for a “new central organization”, which was set up in New Delhi in the name of the Asian Relations Organization (ARO). This however, remained moribund from the very outset. A reading of the ICWA Files shows that the Delhi secretariat was unable to elicit response to its requests for information from national units despite repeated attempts. The ARC folded its operation quietly “sometime in the middle of 1955” when Nehru, its president, instructed A. Appadorai, the Secretary-General, “I think it is better to wind up the Organization because in the present political climate nothing much can be done..almost from the start of the organization there has been conflicts among member-states and in such a situation I don’t think any useful work can be done.”

The Conference on Indonesia convened in January 1949 in New Delhi by Nehru to discuss the Dutch police action against Indonesia also raised the possibility of a permanent Asian regional organization. Carlos Romulo spoke of how “many members look beyond it [the Conference] to the formation of a permanent organization, a regional association strictly within the framework of the United Nations.” (emphasis added) But Romulo’s prophecy proved unfounded. The Colombo Powers met as an ad hoc group, rather than as members of a institutionalized concert of powers, and neither of their two meetings mentioned the idea of a permanent regional organization.

Some Western and Asian circles had expected Bandung to lead to a regional organization. In a Telegram to the Canadian High Commissioner in Delhi, dated April 12th 1955, 1955, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs noted:

---

“There is the possibility that a permanent organization will develop from the Asian-African Conference, and to a certain extent duplicate the work of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. We trust that any continuing organs set up at Bandung will not displace the Colombo Plan in its special field, nor tend to supplant the United Nations.”\(^{72}\)

But this was clearly a false expectation. By the time of Bandung, the idea of a regional organization had been out of Nehru’s mind. Only the Economic Committee of the Bandung Conference considered a regular body. As per the Final Report of the Economic Committee, there was a discussion on the organisational aspects. The proposals varied from having a permanent organisation with a permanent Secretariat to one for having only informal discussions without any Secretariat. Most were against the setting up of a permanent economic organisation with a permanent Secretariat.\(^{73}\)

While still at Bandung, Nehru was asked by Chou about maintaining a “liaison office” for the next sitting of the Conference, due to be held in Egypt two year later. In a note to his principal aide Krishna Menon, Nehru reveals that the Joint Secretariat for Bandung could play such a role. But Burma’s U Nu reacted strongly against this idea: “there should be no kind of organization or liaison office”, and Nehru concurred with this view.\(^{74}\)

While Bandung and its predecessors did not result in the formation of a regional organization, they did shape the process (including many of the procedural norms) which would have an enduring legacy in Asian regional institution-building efforts in subsequent periods, including the shaping of the ASEAN Way. At the ARC, contentious issues such as those related to the Cold War were avoided because they were likely to “divide the conference.”\(^{75}\) It is ironic but important that Nehru, the keenest proponent of an Asian organization, was also insistent on soft rules for the conduct of deliberations at Asian summits based closely on the Commonwealth Heads of Governments meetings. The aspects of the Commonwealth meetings that most impressed Nehru was that discussions would be held in a “friendly spirit”, and there would be no attempt by states to impose their will on one another. Instead, they were conducted in an atmosphere of by

---

\(^{72}\) Secretary of State for External Affairs to High Commissioner in India, Telegram 224, Ottawa, April 12\(^{th}\), 1955, “ASIAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE”, DEA/12173-40, Volume #21-779, Chapter VII, Far East, Part 7, Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned Nations.

\(^{73}\) Verbatim Records of the Proceedings of the Economic Committee of the Asian-African Conference.

“mutual equality and respect amongst its members”, in which, “when differences arise, they are accepted with tolerance and mutual respect.”\(^76\)

At the first Colombo Powers meeting, Nehru asked that the Colombo Powers “follow the precedent set by the Conferences of Commonwealth Prime Ministers”; these being meetings where disputes between members…were never discussed.\(^77\) In deciding the procedure for Bandung, the Bogor summit decided that “any view expressed at the conference by one or more participating country would not be binding on or be regarded as accepted by any other, unless the latter so desired.”\(^78\) The decision taken at Bogor that “acceptance of the invitation by any one country would in no way involve or imply any change in the status of that country or its relationship with other countries,”\(^79\) was clearly shaped by respect for non-interference, or “the principle that the form of government and the way of life of any country should in no way be subject to interference by another.”\(^80\)

Despite being an official gathering, Bandung maintained a striking continuity with the ARC. Nehru insisted that the rules of procedure at Bandung should be “as flexible as possible”.\(^81\) After a preliminary session to decide on the rules of procedure, the Political Committee at Bandung decided that “there will be no specific rules of procedure”, and that the chairman of the conference (Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjo of Indonesia) would be allowed to conduct its meetings “in accordance with the generally accepted conventions of Conferences.” Moreover, there was to be voting; decisions were to be reached by consensus. Abdulghani would describe the consensus principle as a “deep-rooted and unquestioned practice”, but not just of Indonesians or Asians, but also of African societies.\(^82\) He offered a sociological explanation of the consensus principle: “The object is to reach an acceptable consensus of opinion, and one which not only hurts the feeling or the position of no one, but which actually tends to reinforce the community

---

\(^{75}\) Appadorai, “The Asian Relations Conference”, p.279.
\(^{76}\) Indian ambassador to the US, G.L. Mehta, cited in Low, Struggle for Asia, p.203.
\(^{77}\) The Colombo Conference Minutes, p.4.
\(^{78}\) The Bogor Conference Minutes.
\(^{79}\) The Bogor Conference Minutes.
\(^{80}\) The Bogor Conference Minutes.
\(^{81}\) Ibid., p.75.
\(^{82}\) Abdulghani, The Bandung Spirit, p.29.
feeling.”83 In his view, the rules of procedure at Bandung, “even though of an informal and temporary character - had much influence and a very great role in the running of the Conference.” These rules, “including the principle of deliberation and consensus, were one of the keys to the success of the A-A Conference.”84 More importantly, the consensus principle were not simply a matter of procedure; “In those brief and to the point rules of procedure, basic and important lines of policy were implied.” And chief among these lines of policy was an acknowledgement of the salience of state sovereignty and the non-interference doctrine.

There is a striking resemblance between the rules of procedure that prevailed through the Asian conferences and that of the ASEAN. The “ASEAN Way” too came to be known for informality, preference for consensus over majority voting, avoidance of legalistic procedures, preference for non-binding resolutions and a tendency to avoid contentious bilateral issues in multilateral discussions. While the ASEAN Way is today known as a distinctively Southeast Asian trait, the roots of this “process-driven” approach to regionalism cannot be understood in isolation from the Asian conferences held between 1947 and 1955.85 And the wider regional security grouping, the ASEAN Regional Forum has incorporated the ASEAN model, especially its emphasis on “process over the product” and its procedural norms.

**Conclusion**

While positive sovereignty was an essentially European invention, the greater responsibility for the universalization, if not the creation, of negative sovereignty belongs in the Third World, even though it was initially a by-product of ideas concerning self-determination that originated and were popularized in the West. In explaining the origins of sovereignty norms, the diffusion path from the West to the Third World should be regarded as being no more important than contestations at the intra-Third World level.

The foregoing analysis of debates about sovereignty and non-interference at Asian and Asian-African conferences between 1947 and 1955 contributes to international

83 Ibid.
85 For a critical discussion of the “ASEAN Way” see: Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*. 
relations scholarship in a number of areas. First, it shows that while the “long history of sovereignty as an essentially uncontested concept” might have been true of IR theory, it certainly is not true of policy debates in the Third World. The view of Third World sovereignty as a mere extension of Westphalian principles obscures a good part of the sovereignty game in the Third World. Sovereignty, if not the idea itself, then at least its norms (i.e. principles that help protect sovereignty), has indeed been subjected to heavy contestation in the Third World. While there was basic agreement on some of the basic attributes of sovereignty, such as equality and non-interference, what constitutes equality and interference was a matter of debate. The issues of what the principal norms of sovereignty are, which takes priority over which, and what undermines sovereignty have all been disputed. To ignore these contestations is to miss out on a large part of the picture about the impact of sovereignty in shaping international relations. By focusing on how sovereignty was transferred from the West to the Third World, sovereignty scholars have neglected the contestation of sovereignty within the Third World. While sovereignty scholars are right that there was scarcely any resistance to the basic idea of sovereignty in the Third World, this does not mean there was no contestation within the Third World about its norms. Making the transition from the basic idea of sovereignty, its ideational foundation such as self-determination, nationalism, equality, to developing the norms of sovereignty which can be applied to regulate and conduct international relations proved to be an enormously complicated and controversial enterprise.

Closely related to the above, the construction of non-interference through contestation and compromise mattered. Place a key paradox of Asian regionalism in perspective: how its very concern with sovereignty had inhibited the development of a permanent regional organization for Asia in the immediate aftermath of World War II and why Asian regional institutions today remain “under-institutionalized” and “non-legalized.” Recent attempts to explain this puzzle have focused on US power and preferences; but given their striking similarities with the procedural norms of ASEAN, Bandung and its precursors cannot be ignored in any serious effort to explain the under-institutionalization of Asian regionalism.

In this paper, I have pointed to two areas in which the Asian and Asian-African conferences have had their major impact. The first was their role in delegitimizing great
power military pacts, especially SEATO. The second was their role in shaping the design and process of future Asian regional institutions. The contestations over the norms of sovereignty at the Asian conferences were intimately connected with the rules of procedure. The analysts of Bandung, writing in the immediate aftermath of the Conference, might have missed its long-term impact on Asian regionalism in the normative domain. Few of them actually foresaw that despite its failure to develop a regional institution, they articulated a set of norms that would delegitimise alternative frameworks of regionalism, i.e., the Cold War alliances, which some had cited as an affront to the principles of dignity and equality that underlie sovereign status, and set the course for subsequent regional institution-design. Yet, with the benefit of hindsight, this emerges as a crucial legacy.