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The Post-Bandung Order and the Multiplex Trap: Reconsidering Indonesian Agency and the Imagination of the Global South

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Abstract

The 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference paved the way for envisioning an equitable global order, yet seven decades later, the "Bandung Spirit" remains more ceremonial than substantive. Utilizing Amitav Acharya's "multiplex world" framework, this article proposes the "multiplex trap" to explain the multipolarity paradox: the emergence of more great powers multiplies hierarchical layers rather than democratizing the global order. Here, Indonesia faces complex agency challenges; its consistent multi-layered diplomacy across forums like the G20 and NAM is insufficient to alter global power structures. Through a historical-structural approach, this article highlights how the Global South's reliance on hegemonic vocabulary hinders the production of alternative norms. Case studies—including Indonesia's trade adjustments with the US and the adoption of Chinese surveillance technology—demonstrate how pragmatic choices narrow strategic autonomy. Furthermore, interest fragmentation and limited normative innovation explain the stagnation of "Bandung 2.0." Finally, the article argues Indonesia must evolve from a bloc connector to a formulator of inclusive discourse. By shifting solidarity toward cross-border networks—climate justice, migrant dignity, and digital sovereignty—the Bandung Spirit can be revived not as nostalgia, but as epistemic empowerment for the Global South.

Keywords: *Bandung spirit, multiplex trap, Global South agency, epistemic hierarchy.*

INTRODUCTION

The name Bandung holds a long history of Indonesia's resistance to Dutch colonialism. In 1946, the city witnessed the people's persistence in achieving complete independence from the clutches of colonisers who once again sought to control Indonesia. The people's determination was sharpened by the scorched earth event, "Bandung Lautan Api" (Bandung Sea of Fire). Ismail Marzuki beautifully captured this patriotism in the last two verses of his

work, *"Halo-Halo Bandung."* He wrote, "Now it has become a sea of fire/Come on, let's take it back."

Two decades before the scorched earth incident, Sukarno read an iconic defence before the Dutch East Indies court. The text of his plea, *Indonesia Menggugat* (1930), exposed the Dutch colonial system that oppressed the Indonesian people socially, politically, and economically. Sukarno also provided an international analysis of imperialism, distinguishing between two types: old and modern. Although different, the fundamentals remain the same: imperialism tends to have ambitions to control or influence other nations (Sukarno, 1983). Simply put, the practice of colonialism cannot be separated from the international system and world governance.

In line with Sukarno, Mohammad Hatta, a decade earlier, on January 17, 1926, delivered a speech in front of members of the Indonesian Association (PI) explaining that the only way to destroy the roots of European imperialism was through the independence of the colonies (Stutje, 2024). Hatta actively practised his ideas by getting involved in a transnational network of independence activists from colonised countries in Europe. He attended the early stages of the Asian-African Conference (AAC) in Bandung in 1955 and was elected as an executive committee member. Following this meeting, the PI became more closely connected to the international solidarity movement, aiming to garner sympathy from other actors for Indonesia's struggle for independence.

The sharpening of the idea of Indonesian nationalism, which cannot be separated from the international struggle of colonised nations, was later formalised in the preamble to the constitution. The first paragraph of the 1945 Constitution states, "Independence is the right of all nations, and therefore colonialism in the world must be abolished, because it is not in accordance with humanity and justice." Sukarno, in his presentation on Pancasila at the BPUPKI session, also mentioned the second principle of internationalism or humanity, which means the realisation of solidarity between independent Indonesia and other colonised nations. After independence, Indonesia formulated a free and active international political norm, which was not neutral but aligned with the anti-colonial struggle worldwide.

Indonesia's involvement in creating a just and equitable world order, through its support for the elimination of colonialism, can be traced back to its active participation in various pre-UN meetings and, after the end of World War II, Indonesia, which was still fighting against Dutch aggression, successfully sent a delegation to the 1947 Asian Relations Conference. This meeting successfully compiled an important explanation of anti-imperialism issues before the war evolved into a post-war decolonisation project, as well as helped determine Asia's position in the new international politics (Utama, 2017).

The preliminary meeting for the KAA was then held in Colombo in 1954. This conference brought together the prime ministers of Burma, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. Each delegation took turns delivering speeches that discussed the Cold War conflict and Asian issues, such as the Vietnam War. During the discussion session on April 30, Indonesian Prime Minister Ali Sastromidjojo presented the idea of holding the KAA in Indonesia under the sponsorship of the Colombo Powers (Utama, 2017). Further discussions were held in Bogor in December 1954. The five prime ministers met again to discuss the objectives of the KAA. A joint statement containing four points successfully summarised the main purpose of the KAA, namely to promote cooperation, seek solutions to common problems, and promote world peace.

The long-awaited moment arrived, and Bandung once again witnessed the momentum of the broader struggle against colonialism. Twenty-nine nations from Asia and Africa sent their delegations to attend the KAA from April 18 to 24, 1955. The world's attention was almost entirely focused on this city of half a million people. The KAA was the culmination of many aspirations for Asian-African solidarity, decolonisation, world peace, and the possibility of forming new alliances (Utama, 2017). For Sukarno, this was a historic meeting between various nations of colour. More broadly, it was a significant moment in the international world at the onset of the Cold War.

Sukarno delivered a speech entitled Let a New Asia and Africa be Born, which reaffirmed his opposition to modern imperialism. He described the "lifeline of imperialism" stretching from the Strait of Gibraltar, the Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the China Sea, to Japan. This line marked many colonised nations and the main route of capital migration from Asia and Africa to the Western world. He also criticised the moral coercion of nations through the Cold War project, dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. For him, the KAA was a prototype of world peace diplomacy, representing the voice of the majority of the world's population.

At the end of the conference, all KAA contestants read a joint communiqué containing ten points of cooperation in various fields. This statement is famously known as the Bandung Principles, which later became the spirit of the Third World to redefine the values, norms, and structures of the international world. The adoption of the principle of coexistence, also known as peaceful coexistence, was also agreed upon. This was one of the important achievements of the KAA, which encouraged the resolution of conflicts through compromise and dialogue, rather than open confrontation, and was supported by a stance of rejecting all forms of intervention in each other's domestic politics.

The Bandung Principles, also

known as the "Bandung Spirit," spread a significant belief among the coloured nations. This statement sparked a wave of global emancipation, with more than 71 Asian and African countries gaining political independence from the grip of colonialism and imperialism (Jati, 2013). The KAA also encouraged diplomacy through cultural exchanges, which resulted in a series of important meetings, namely the Asian-African Student Conference (1956); the Asian-African Women's Conference (1958); the Asian-African Writers' Conference (1958); the Asian-African Youth Conference (1959); the Asian-African Journalists Conference (1963); the Asian-African Labor Conference (1964); the Asian-African Film Festival (1964); and the Asian-African Islamic Conference (1965) (Lee, 2010).

Symbolically, the KAA also reinforced the identity of the Third World, which was not merely a passive actor in the Cold War struggle. Albert Sauvy first proposed the initial thesis of the Third World in his writing in *L'Observateur*. Sauvy divided the planet into three parts: first (the capitalist bloc), second (the socialist bloc), and third (the periphery). Rather than being separated by geographical boundaries, political positions became the dividing line between each bloc. The leaders of the two main blocs, the United States and the Soviet Union, played an active role in establishing their identities as world powers. Later, the Third World came to be known as the Southern countries.

Later, the spirit of Bandung paved the way for the formation of a new political bloc within the United Nations. It began with a condemnation of the injustice of the global order and the division of the world resulting from the bipolarity of the Cold War. The formation of this UN bloc, over time, would become the highest achievement of the Bandung Conference —especially because this bloc, together with the socialist bloc, would become a bulwark against "dollar imperialism" and offer an alternative development model (Prashad, 2025). One of their main demands was the democratisation of the institution, which was seriously discussed at the Non-Aligned Movement meeting. The way forward was to agitate for broader democracy in UN institutions, particularly in the all-powerful Security Council, so that it could become an instrument for creating global justice.

The creation of a new world order was also mentioned by Sukarno in his speech *To Build a World Anew* at the UN General Assembly in 1960. He criticised the conventional Cold War doctrine that divided the planet into only two poles with the addition of a neutral camp, namely the non-aligned. Sukarno then provided a new categorisation between imperialist and neocolonialist nations, which he included as "Old Established Forces" (Oldefo), and new nations with a progressive revolutionary character, which he called "New Emerging Forces" (NEF). The UN must side with the

latter, because Nefo represents more than half of the world's population.

Beyond political initiatives, such as the NAM, which adopted the spirit of Bandung, there were other efforts in the form of fighting for a fair international economic system. The first step was taken through demands for the elimination of discriminatory trade tariffs imposed by the First World. The G-77 was formed as a practical means of fighting for this (Prashad, 2025). The removal of regulatory barriers was crucial in boosting export revenues for domestic development in the Third World. However, over time, this forum merely followed the Western model of development, while Third World countries failed to achieve independence.

Now, after 70 years, the Bandung Conference remains an important milestone that opened up the imagination for a more just and equitable global order, as well as an initial effort by Southern countries to define themselves outside the hegemonic framework. Even so, the spirit of Bandung, as well as all subsequent initiatives, has not succeeded in creating a new world order as envisioned. This suggests that the KAA has merely become a symbol in diplomatic practice, without being accompanied by the consolidation of a substantive agenda to renew its relevance. Another problem is the growing fragmentation among Southern countries, which undermines collective solidarity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For almost half a century, the Cold War conflict colored the world’s political stage. The division of the world marked this conflict into two main blocs: the East (Socialism) and the West (Capitalism). Both promoted democracy with a clear demarcation between the rhetoric of participation by the people and participation for freedom. The battle between the two was not limited to the creation of nuclear and space technology, but also opened up a free field for competition for influence among newly independent countries. The latter were labelled the "third world" or, in contemporary terms, the "Southern countries."

The collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) in the early 1990s marked the official end of the Cold War. World politics entered a period of transition with the emergence of the United States (US) as the sole superpower. A decade later, the dawn of a new millennium gave birth to a challenger to the US from the East, namely China (Layne, 2008). This phenomenon surprised many observers, as China was able to maintain an average economic growth rate of 8-9 per cent for nearly two decades throughout the Asian crisis. As a result, China experienced a resurgence as a new global economic power, significantly increasing its prestige on the world stage. Even so, China claims that its resurgence is peaceful, without any aggressive tendencies that could threaten its neighbours.

Amidst the world's transition from unipolarity to multipolarity, various initiatives in the form of alternative institutions have also emerged. One that has received the most attention is BRICS. In particular, for Southern countries, the presence of BRICS is a breakthrough, as its main agenda is being pushed towards creating a new system as an alternative to accessing funding that has so far relied on donors from the Northern Hemisphere. In addition, regional multilateral institutions have grown, localised geographically in carrying out the collective movement of the Global South, such as Mercosur in Latin America, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Gulf Cooperation Council in the Middle East, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in Central Asia (Jati, 2025).

In the discourse of international relations, Amitav Acharya refers to the transition from unipolarity to a more fragmented and diverse world order as the 'Multiplex World'. This concept defines the current world system as no longer adhering to the traditional multipolar nature that existed before World War II, particularly in European countries. However, today's multiplicity tends to stem from the diversity of actors that are not limited to states, but also include international and regional institutions, multinational corporations, transnational NGOs, and even transnational criminal and terrorist groups (Acharya, 2014a). This model should open up more space for actors from the Global South to expand their agency and formulate alternative norms (Acharya, 2016a).

The emergence of diverse actors will lead to a shift in the centre of the world order away from the US, aligning more closely with the shift in global power and ideas related to the multipolar world. Acharya's concept explicitly calls for the recognition of broader agency, encompassing both material and ideational elements, including resistance, normative action, and the construction of a global order that originates from the local. The desires of the powerful do not drive the emergence of alternative agencies, but rather stems from the manifestation of the weak as a weapon against the established order, for example, through the creation of new rules and institutions at the local level to support a new global order (Acharya, 2011).

Although theoretically the *multiplex* order opens up opportunities for normative pluralism through the diversity of actors, in practice it often creates a 'multiplex trap'. If this new order is viewed through the lens of Realism or Neorealism, the emphasis will be dominated by material resources and *great powers.* At[IJ1] the same time, the normative dimension, central to the countries of the South, will be considered irrelevant. Without a clear framework such as *a dialogue of civilisations*, the multipolar vision risks ending up like Huntington's *multicivilizational-multipolar* model, which essentially continues to operate within the logic of *a sphere-of-influence world* and material power structures (Petito, 2016). In

other words, the logic of hierarchy and inequality is maintained in a different form, for example, the tendency to conceptualise the emerging world order within the framework of European history. Despite arguing that the post-war US liberal order was limited to like-minded countries around the Atlantic (*half-hegemony)*, the main elements of the old order were retained in the new governance system (Acharya, 2016b).

The perpetuation of this hierarchy is also supported by the dominance of discourse in the discipline of international relations. The academic tradition rooted in Britain and North America does not reflect the voices, experiences, knowledge claims, and contributions of the majority of the world's population. There is also a neglect of the impact of colonialism and its legacy in reading global relations. As a result, an epistemic imbalance persists, causing most Southern countries to continue operating under concepts formulated by old and new hegemonic powers (Acharya, 2016a).

There is also a tendency for the discipline of international relations to flatter Western thinkers (such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Kant) while ignoring and marginalising non-Western thinkers, including Ashoka, Kautilya, Sun Tzu, Ibn Khaldun, Jawaharlal Nehru, Raul Prebisch, and Franz Fanon. This leads to the broad assumption that Western academics are responsible for providing theory, while their non-Western counterparts are limited to supplying raw data, especially regarding regional studies (Acharya, 2016a). To this day, key concepts such as sovereignty, autonomy, and multipolarity, which are rooted in the *Westphalian* model, remain the primary norms in international relations. Acharya argues that the *Westphalian* conception of world order must be set aside when analysing the past, present, and future of international relations (Acharya, 2014a).

The failure of Southern countries to develop their own theories is also due to their international relations academics, who have internalised and accepted the dominance of Western scholars. Many of them believe that non-Americans can become leading theorists by "standing on the shoulders of Americans" (Acharya, 2016a). As a result, Southern countries are unable to produce their own vocabulary that can challenge the dominance of global hegemonic discourse.

Historically, the KAA has successfully pioneered the creation of new blocs and norms in international relations. This conference marked the emergence of Southern countries as a global political force and paved the way from bipolarity to multipolarity. The conference reinforced global norms such as sovereignty and non-intervention, while developing them into tools to resist the hypocrisy of major powers and the sense of subordination in the global rule-making process (Acharya, 2011). However, over time, the KAA lost its normative function in binding contemporary diplomatic practices and became merely a

historical symbol (Farid, 2022).

The failure of the Bandung spirit to become a global norm in international practice was largely due to the breakdown of alliances and the interference of major powers. The first test for the KAA was the border dispute between China and India, which escalated into open war in 1962. Then, a series of coups and changes in the leadership of the Third World with a radical anti-imperialist vision, such as Sukarno and Nkrumah, also shook the sustainability of this project. In the case of Indonesia, Sukarno's conception of foreign policy was later toned down and replaced with a modern approach that emphasised political neutrality (Farid, 2022).

Indonesia's vision, especially under Sukarno, was one of broad nationalism that must unite with the struggles of other oppressed nations, particularly in the East, to fight against international imperialism. Sukarno's *New Emerging Forces* (NEFOS) doctrine reflected the view that international tensions were rooted in imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, and aimed to create a new and just world order. However, after the tragedy of 1965 and the end of Sukarno's rule, Indonesia has not succeeded in localising global norms within the domestic context, nor in exporting local norms that can be more widely adopted in the radical spirit of Bandung (Farid, 2022).

The current world order is characterised as a 'Multiplex World' by Amitav Acharya, resulting in a paradoxical duality for Southern countries such as Indonesia. On the one hand, this phenomenon has given rise to a variety of actors, alternative resources and ideas, paving the way for non-Western agency and new normative concepts in international politics. On the other hand, this system carries the trap of multiplicity by maintaining the hierarchy and inequality of the old logic, forcing actors such as Indonesia to be cautious when navigating their involvement in geopolitics. This analysis will examine how Indonesia is involved in the dynamics of multiplicity and the obstruction of Indonesia's active agency as a pioneer of the Bandung Spirit, hindering its consolidation into a global agenda for Southern countries.

Indonesia in the Multiplex Trap

The year 2025 marks a new chapter in international political dynamics, following US President Donald Trump's announcement of new import tariffs. In his speech on April 2, Trump officially imposed reciprocal or retaliatory tariffs on his trading partners. He called the move a way to free the US economy from dependence on imports. Indonesia was initially subject to a 32 per cent import tariff.

The shock of Trump's reciprocal tariffs is expected to affect Indonesia's export performance in the future. In 2024, Indonesia's exports to the US reached 9.7 per cent of the total export value. Indonesia's main export products to the US include electronics, textiles, footwear, palm oil, rubber, furniture, and marine fishery

products (Sutrisno, 2025). Executive Director of the Centre of Economic and Law Studies (CELIOS), Bima Yudhistira, stated that Trump's new import duties would affect the quantity of Indonesian exports to the US, while also having a negative impact on the export volumes of other countries (Antara, 2025).

The imposition of a 32 per cent import duty prompted Indonesia to immediately form a negotiation team to lobby Donald Trump in Washington. A report in Tempo magazine revealed that the tariff negotiations were actually agreed upon via a telephone call between Donald Trump, accompanied by US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, and President Prabowo Subianto. After some small talk, Trump opened with an offer of 20 per cent, but Lutnick whispered to his president to come up with a figure of 19 per cent (Akbar, 2025). This tariff reduction did not come for free. Trump demanded Indonesia's commitment to purchase US$15 billion worth of US energy products and US$4.5 billion worth of agricultural products, to purchase 50 Boeing aircraft, to reduce non-tariff barriers, and to lower import tariffs on US products into Indonesia to 0 per cent.

Although Indonesia's bilateral diplomacy succeeded in achieving concessions such as a reduction in export tariffs, this dynamic reflects asymmetrical negotiations that perpetuate the illusion of sovereignty. The method of diplomacy via telephone also emerged as a result of the increasing fragmentation of global governance. This recent move undermines democratic participation, as actors with resources avoid large meetings to reduce costs, choosing instead to participate in smaller ones where they can effectively influence the decisions of a regime (Acharya, 2016b).

Indonesia's successful diplomacy in lowering tariffs is like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, this is positive because it shows the government's performance in international lobbying to open trade markets for Indonesian products. However, on the other hand, it is negative and shows inequality. The US, as a powerful actor, uses the appeal of access to its massive consumer market as a bargaining tool to achieve greater strategic goals: (1) Securing markets for its strategic industries (Boeing is an icon of the US aerospace industry), and (2) Promoting its energy exports (LNG) to strengthen its position as a global energy player while reducing other countries' dependence on energy sources from its rivals. The reality of asymmetric negotiations means that weaker parties have limited room for manoeuvre and often have to accept package deals that are more favourable to the stronger party (Zartman & Rubin, 2000). This aligns with the argument of political economists, who state that developing countries are often integrated into the global economy on terms set by the capitalist centre (Wallerstein, 2011). Short-term victories, such as tariffs, obscure long-term strategic defeats: the failure to achieve autonomous industrial independence.

In the global context, the multiplex trap can be traced back to the missed opportunity to restructure the Bretton Woods system, which formed the basis of global financial governance following the 2008-2009 crisis. The proposal was blocked by the G7, particularly the United States, which essentially aimed to maintain its dominance on the global stage (Barbieri, 2022). In other words, even though Indonesia participates in the G7's subsidiary forum, the G20, as a platform for discussing international financial issues, the system's architecture still keeps the hierarchy untouched (Khudori, 2022). The illusion of trade sovereignty achieved by Indonesia through *bilateral* negotiations may be transactional in nature, binding it to contractual commitments that benefit stronger central actors—a manifestation of the hierarchy that persists in the *multiplex* system. The multiplex trap ensnares Indonesia in a series of short-term pragmatic choices that, cumulatively, fail to change *the grammar of order* that underlies the global architecture (Cox, 1981). Indonesia is on many stages, but the script is still largely written by the major powers.

Indonesia's Limitations and the Fading Spirit of Bandung

As one of the initiators of the Asian - African Conference (KAA), Indonesia has significant historical capital to transform the Spirit of Bandung into an alternative global norm. The 1955 KAA was a peak moment when Indonesia not only adapted to the global order but also proactively offered an alternative vision—an order based on solidarity, equality, and sovereignty, as well as a rejection of power bloc politics. The Bandung Spirit is the antithesis of the multiplex trap. However, this legacy now lives more in rhetoric than in strategic reality.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), as one of the institutional manifestations of the Bandung Spirit, was born with a clear strategic orientation: to serve as a third way amid the Cold War. Its mission was to provide room for manoeuvre for newly independent countries so that they would not be dragged into becoming proxies for one of the superpowers. From the outset of the NAM conference in Belgrade in 1961, the seeds of internal conflict between the moderate and radical camps had been sown. The moderate group was represented by Nehru, whose main recommendation was to take a softer approach to the issue of decolonisation in order to avoid confrontation between the two main blocs. In contrast, the radical group insisted on eradicating colonialism and neocolonialism through open conflict. The radical group then formed its own forum at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana in 1966, driven by the revolutionary spirit of Che Guevara (Artner, 2022).

However, with the end of the Cold War, the NAM lost its *raison* d'être. The common enemy was gone, and the movement failed to find a new enemy that could unite its members—whether it was global

economic injustice, climate change, or digital hegemony. As a result, the NAM transformed into a forum without a solid strategic orientation. Its meetings became a venue for nostalgia, and the reading of declarations sounded increasingly hollow. Internal fragmentation also worsened. Its members had very diverse and often conflicting interests. Oil-exporting countries had a different agenda from small island states, which were threatened by rising sea levels. Liberal democracies held different views on human rights compared to authoritarian states. Without a concrete unifying vision, the NAM was no longer a driving force for global change, but merely a diplomatic social club.

As the NAM declines, the moral leadership of the Bandung Spirit is diminished. In the past, Bandung was characterised by its emphasis on norms and values, including anti-colonialism, peace, and cooperation. Now, the "Spirit of Bandung" is more often quoted in speeches to wrap up short-term diplomatic transactions. The "Spirit of Bandung" is now more often used as rhetorical sugarcoating to justify transactional economic cooperation. Rizal Sukma observes that Indonesia's post-Suharto foreign policy, despite returning to the principle of "free and active," is heavily influenced by pragmatism that prioritises domestic economic interests over the pursuit of grand normative agendas (Sukma, 1999). As a result, the visionary meaning of Bandung has been eroded, replaced by short-term cost-benefit calculations that are characteristic of the multiplex world.

Visionary normative meanings — such as how to build a more equitable global financial architecture, or how to create a global data regime that protects the digital sovereignty of developing countries—are no longer the main substance of Indonesia's diplomacy in the name of Bandung. Strengthening this normative meaning requires significant intellectual and diplomatic investment, as well as a willingness to take risks that may not be popular among the major powers. It is much easier and safer to make Bandung a ceremonial symbol, a comfortable commemorative ritual, than to make it a blueprint for radical global action.

Suppose the Spirit of Bandung from the past has faded. In that case, hopes for the emergence of an alternative order are now often pinned on the new constellation of powers in the "Global South," particularly BRICS and regional forums such as ASEAN. However, the foundations of this solidarity are fragile and have not yet been able to support a truly new global order project. BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and its new members) is often seen as the main challenger to the dominance of the G7 and the Western order. Initiatives such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) are concrete attempts to build alternative institutions. However, BRICS functions more as an elitist and *state-centric* counterforum. Its logic is to

balance existing powers, not to create a fundamentally different system.

BRICS is often seen as a challenger to the dominance of the G7. However, many analysts see it more as a *state-centric* counterforum, driven by the national interests of its major members, especially China (Stuenkel, 2020). The BRICS has not been able to establish normative solidarity rooted in the interests of civil society across its member countries. Its focus is more on adjusting the balance of power at the global elite level than on fighting for a broader global justice agenda, as envisioned by the Third World movement in the Bandung era.

The interests that drive BRICS are the national interests of its large member countries, not a normative solidarity rooted in cross-border community interests. The BRICS agenda focuses more on reforming voting quotas at the IMF or increasing trade among members, rather than on broader global justice issues such as debt cancellation for poor countries, migrant workers' rights, or equitable environmental protection. For Indonesia, joining BRICS carries the risk of being drawn into the geopolitical orbit of China and Russia, which may not align with the principles of "free and active" diplomacy or democratic values. The solidarity offered by BRICS is solidarity among powerful countries, not solidarity among the oppressed as envisioned by the Spirit of Bandung.

At the regional level, ASEAN is a success story in diplomacy. However, ASEAN's success lies in its role as a manager of the status quo. The principle of the "ASEAN Way," especially non-intervention, has limited its capacity to act normatively on issues such as the democratic crisis in Myanmar (Jones, 2016). ASEAN is designed to manage relations between member states and with major powers peacefully, not to project a vision of an alternative global order. As Acharya explains, ASEAN is a successful example of regional security community building; however, its role as *a norm entrepreneur* at the global level remains very limited (Acharya, 2014b).

Indonesia's limitations in the regional environment of ASEAN reveal its limitations in influencing the global political stage. Indonesia (and ASEAN in general) demonstrates its agency through localisation. This is a dynamic process in which local actors actively reconstruct foreign ideas to align with their local beliefs and practices (*cognitive priors*). In the case of *cooperative security* norms*,* ASEAN has successfully localised them by expanding *the security agenda* while maintaining its normative hierarchy (non-interference remains at the top). This is an example of adaptive agency, where external changes are accepted to strengthen existing practices rather than radically replacing them (Acharya, 2004).

At the macro level, Indonesia's limitations are manifested in its participation in the G20 or its exploration of BRICS membership. Presence in these forums provides status, but does not substantially

change Indonesia's position in the global hierarchy. The G20, for example, has been criticised for its role as a stabiliser of the existing neoliberal system, rather than as a forum for fundamental reform (Wade, 2011). Indonesia can provide input, but does not have the capacity to change *the grammar of* order—that is, the underlying structure of financial and trade hegemony. This participation creates an illusion of influence. Indonesia is actively attending various forums, a hallmark of its foreign policy as an engaged *middle power*. However, these activities often reflect adaptation to the existing order rather than transformative efforts to change it (Cooper, Higgott & Nossal, 2007).

Currently, Indonesia's foreign policy is more reactive and adaptive, a characteristic that Mohammad Hatta refers to as "rowing between two rocks". This is a smart survival strategy, but not a leadership strategy. The way out of the multiplex trap requires a transformation from adaptive agency to proactive agency, from a *norm-taker* to a *norm-maker* (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 2007). To produce "Bandung 2.0," not only is political involvement needed, but also the production of its own universal vocabulary, as China has attempted with the concept *of relational theory.* The failure *of the Global South,* in general, to produce a theoretical vocabulary capable of challenging hegemonic discourse means that Indonesia remains within a Realist/Neorealist framework of thinking, which focuses on material power or is trapped in the Western model of growth (economism) (Khudori 2022).

Indonesia's agency focuses on **maintaining autonomy** through *the norm of* subsidiarity—creating rules to protect itself from the domination of stronger central actors—as in maintaining the principle of non-interference in ASEAN. This is a reactive and protective agency, not an agency that proactively formulates alternatives for the global architecture, so that the emerging *multiplex* order still faces the risk warned by Petito: a return to the logic *of the sphere-of-influence world* or *Concert,* where the norms and interests *of the Global South* remain marginalised (Acharya, 2011).

The biggest challenge for Indonesia is its failure to produce new norms. There has been no "Bandung 2.0" capable of responding to contemporary challenges such as digital sovereignty, climate justice, or global financial reform. Without a vision and concrete proposals, Indonesia will continue to speak the language of the past. Ultimately, the multiplex trap is not destiny. Indonesia can continue to be a skilled navigator in the currents created by others, or it can try to become a force that determines the direction of world politics itself. This choice will determine whether Indonesia will remain a subject in the history of 21st-century international relations or rise again to become a respected actor, as once envisioned by the nation's founders.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

An analysis of Indonesia's position and that of the Global South in the contemporary global order reveals a profound paradox. On the one hand, the fluid multipolar world offers more diplomatic stages and partners than ever before. On the other hand, this flexibility gives rise to the "multiplex trap," in which active participation can actually reinforce old hierarchies and obscure limitations on agency. Based on this analysis, several key conclusions can be drawn, leading to a series of strategic recommendations for the future of Indonesian diplomacy.

Conclusion: Indonesia in the Trap of Symbolic Stagnation and the Illusion of Influence

The stagnation of the Bandung Spirit became a symbolic myth, preventing it from serving as the foundation of a vibrant and cohesive order. The KAA was an undeniable historical breakthrough, successfully opening up the imagination to a more equitable world order and challenging the bipolar logic of the Cold War. It gave birth to the Bandung Principles, which inspired a wave of decolonisation and the formation of a Third World identity. However, after seven decades, this legacy lives more in ceremony and rhetoric than in substantive diplomatic practice. Institutions born from its womb, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), have lost *their raison d'être* in the post-Cold War era and have been fragmented by the diversity of their members' national interests, rendering them forums without a solid strategic orientation. The spirit of resistance and the creation of new norms has been reduced to sweetening speeches to wrap up short-term diplomatic transactions, a comfortable ritual of nostalgia rather than a blueprint for radical global action. Bandung has not evolved into Bandung 2.0 because it has failed to renew itself in response to contemporary challenges, such as digital hegemony and climate injustice.

The phenomenon of multipolarity in a multiplex world tends to increase the number of hegemonic actors without fundamentally altering the existing hierarchy. The emergence of new powers such as China and alternative forums such as BRICS is often misinterpreted as the democratisation of the global order. In reality, as warned in the "multiplex trap" framework, this actually increases the layers of hierarchy and poles of influence, forcing countries such as Indonesia to navigate between more major powers. Rather than creating a new system, it maintains the logic *of spheres of influence* in a new form. The case study of Indonesia's trade negotiations with the United States, where tariff reductions must be offset by strategic import commitments worth billions of dollars, is a clear manifestation of asymmetric negotiations that perpetuate the illusion of sovereignty. These short-term victories obscure the long-term strategic defeat of failing to build domestic independence. In other words, this new order continues to operate

with *the* old *grammar of order*, in which capitalist centres continue to dictate the terms of integration for peripheral countries.

Finally, Indonesia's active presence in various global forums has yet to be translated into tangible change in the grammar of global power. Indonesia has demonstrated consistency in its multi-layered diplomacy by participating in various forums, including the NAM, G77, G20, and BRICS. These activities do provide status and a stage, but they reflect reactive and adaptive agency rather than proactive and transformative agency. As in the ASEAN framework, Indonesia more often acts through localisation—adapting external norms to fit existing practices—rather than exporting radical new norms. Participation in the G20, for example, puts Indonesia at the global financial negotiating table, but does not give it the capacity to overhaul the fundamentally flawed Bretton Woods system. As a result, Indonesia is merely adept at navigating itself to "row between two rocks." It has not yet been able to become an architect of redesigning the map of navigation on the global stage. This participation creates the illusion of influence, while the script of the global order is still largely written by the major powers.

Recommendation: Towards Epistemic Empowerment and Network Diplomacy

Faced with this trap, Indonesia needs a paradigm shift. Instead of continuing to adapt, Indonesia needs to begin innovating. The way out is not to look for new "reefs" to lean on, but to learn to create its own currents.

First, shift the focus from the obsession with pursuing a "new centre" to a more *networked* diplomacy that is not tied to any particular centre of power. Joining BRICS or simply being active in the G20 risks only moving Indonesia from one orbit of influence to another without significantly increasing its autonomy. The multiplex world, with its diversity of actors, actually opens up opportunities for more fluid and flexible diplomacy. Indonesia can position itself not only as a bridge between blocs but as a node in various networks of specific issues. This means building *ad hoc* coalitions with various actors—both state and non-state—for concrete purposes, regardless of their bloc affiliations. This network diplomacy will free Indonesia from the necessity to always "choose sides" and enable it to shape the agenda from a more agile and strategic position.

Second, build cross-border issue-oriented solidarity as a new basis for Global South collaboration. Solidarity based solely on geographical identity or colonial history has proven to be inadequate and fragile. The future of Southern solidarity lies in joint struggles for concrete issues whose impacts are felt across national borders. Indonesia can spearhead the formation of alliances for climate justice, demanding historical accountability from developed and

industrialised countries; fighting for the dignity of migrants; creating a framework for the protection of cross-border workers; upholding digital sovereignty; and formulating fair global rules for data and technology amid US-China competition. Focusing on these issues will shift solidarity from mere trade transactions between state elites to a movement rooted in the interests of society and global justice.

Third, strengthen the production of diplomatic vocabulary from the womb of Global South experience, not just adopt hegemonic narratives. One of the most subtle traps is the "epistemic hierarchy," where Southern countries continue to think and debate using concepts (such as sovereignty, development, and security) formulated by old and new hegemonic powers. As a result, proposed solutions often remain anchored in the old framework. Indonesia, along with its intellectuals and academics, must invest in developing alternative theories and concepts rooted in its own historical experiences and local contexts. This does not mean rejecting all outside thinking, but rather building the confidence to produce its own knowledge and vocabulary that can be offered to the world stage, just as China has begun to promote its own theories.

Fourth, if Bandung wants to remain relevant, it must be reinterpreted as a project of epistemic empowerment and normative innovation, not merely historical nostalgia. The future of the Bandung Spirit does not lie in the past, but in its ability to inspire the future. Rather than celebrating it as a historical artefact, Indonesia must position it as a call to action: a call to produce new norms that can respond to the challenges of the 21st century. "Bandung 2.0" must be an intellectual and diplomatic movement to redefine the meaning of justice, sovereignty, and solidarity in the era of digitalisation and ecological crisis. Only in this way can Indonesia escape the multiplex trap, shifting from being merely an object in the history of international relations to a respected subject that helps determine the direction of the world in the future.

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