Bandung and the limitations of New Zealand foreign policy

Andrew Lim
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Abstract

This paper looks at New Zealand's response to the Bandung Conference of 1955. The Holland Government's Western-aligned foreign and security policies, along with New Zealand's "self-identity" as a Western country, led it to oppose any New Zealand participation at the Asian-African Conference. In line with its Cold War policies and close attachment to “Mother Britain”, New Zealand policy-makers viewed Bandung as a potential hot bed for Communist propaganda and anti-White agitation.

Besides the government response, this paper looks at public discourses towards the Bandung Conference in New Zealand; focusing on the mainstream newspapers and left-wing groups like the Communist Party and the New Zealand Peace Council. This paper makes an original contribution to the literature on the Bandung Conference by examining New Zealand’s response or “lack of response” to that historic event.

Key words: Bandung conference, Cold War, New Zealand, Western alignment
Introduction

The Bandung Conference was a major gathering of newly-independent Asian and African countries held in 18-25 April 1955. The Conference had originated as a joint initiative by the governments of Indonesia, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Burma (Myanmar), and Pakistan (known collectively as the Colombo Five) to promote better cooperation and understanding among Third World countries. It hosted several prominent Asian and African leaders including the Indonesian President Sukarno, the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, and the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Bandung Conference produced a ground-breaking communique advocating peaceful economic and cooperation among Afro-Asian countries, human rights, world peace, and the elimination of colonialism and nuclear weapons. It was held at a time of rising Cold War tensions between the Western “Free World” led by the United States and the Communist Bloc led by the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The Colombo Five had organized the Bandung Conference in opposition to American efforts in 1954 to corral Asian countries into the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO), a Western military alliance aimed at containing the PRC. Rejecting the bipolar international system, the Conference’s organisers sought to promote closer cooperation among Third World countries while simultaneously lessening their dependence on the West and Communist Bloc. While the Bandung Conference failed to end tensions within the Third World, it gave rise to the modern Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).1

Due to their strategic interests in Southeast Asia, the White-dominated countries of Australia and New Zealand naturally took an interest in the proceedings of the Bandung

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Conference. As former British settler colonies which had since evolved into self-governing countries, Australia and New Zealand were considered to be the isolated “white tribes” of a predominantly non-White region. Despite their close proximity to Asia, invitations were not extended to Australia and New Zealand due to two main factors: first, because they fell outside the “Afro-Asian area”; and second, because Indonesia was incensed with Canberra and Wellington’s support for the Dutch claim to West New Guinea, which Jakarta regarded as an inalienable part of Indonesia.\(^2\) The Holland National Government believed that New Zealand’s attendance at the Bandung Conference could be a “source of embarrassment” since its organisers’ non-aligned agenda clashed with New Zealand’s Western aligned foreign and security policies.\(^3\) Despite Wellington’s indifference towards Bandung, it drew some interest from certain left-wing political and academic quarters which saw it as presenting an alternative vision to New Zealand’s Western Cold War alignment.\(^4\) These left-wing voices foreshadowed the growing dissension with New Zealand’s foreign and security policies that came to fore during the Vietnam War.

While there is some literature on official Australian, British, and American responses to the Bandung Conference, the New Zealand response has not been studied until now.\(^5\) This article looks at an overlooked chapter in the history of New Zealand’s Asian engagement. It addresses several questions. First, how did New Zealand’s aversion towards Bandung reflect its


contemporary foreign and security policies and view of its own “place in the world”? Second, how was New Zealand’s position on the Bandung conference influenced by its ties to Britain, Australia, and the United States? Thirdly, to what extent did New Zealand’s response to Bandung reflect the limits of its foreign policy towards Southeast Asia? Finally, what were non-governmental media and left-wing responses to the Bandung Conference?

This article draws upon several archival records from Archives New Zealand and the National Library of New Zealand. It also consults several Government publications: namely, the *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (NZPD)*, the *Annual Reports of the Department of External Affairs (NZDEA)*, and the NZDEA’s official journal, *External Affairs Review*. To sample public opinion, this article consults several newspapers including *The Dominion, New Zealand Herald (NZH)*, *Evening Post, Otago Daily Times (ODT)*, and the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ)’s official organ, *The People’s Voice (PV)* along with the proceedings of the Christchurch Convention on International Relations held in August 1955.

**New Zealand’s search for security**

New Zealand’s indifference towards Bandung was influenced by the Holland National Government’s Cold War foreign and security policies; which were linked to New Zealand’s identity as a Western Anglophone offshoot. In 1955, New Zealand was governed by the conservative National Party led by Sidney Holland, a successful businessman who had unified the political right into a formidable political force. Holland had earlier established his credentials as a Cold War Prime Minster by closing down New Zealand’s Legation in Moscow in 1950 and confronting militant watersiders during the 1951 Waterfront Lockout.6 Under the Holland

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Government, New Zealand pursued a staunchly anti-Communist, Western-aligned foreign policy which prioritised New Zealand’s relations with the United Kingdom and the United States. Contemporary New Zealand foreign and security policies were shaped by its strong political and economic ties with the “Mother Britain,” its sibling relationship with Australia, and American global Cold War security considerations. Like their Western counterparts, New Zealand policy-makers and strategists viewed Communism as a totalitarian ideology bent on world domination. Communist activities in China, Korea, Vietnam, and Malaya were seen as manifestations of a Communist “domino effect” engulfing Southeast Asia; which Wellington regarded as its “Near North.” In this uncertain international climate, New Zealand’s “search for security” led the Holland Government to embed the country within a web of Western “collective security” alliances including the 1951 ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand and the United States) security treaty, SEATO, and the highly secretive UK-USA/Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network. Thus by 1955, New Zealand had a clear view of “its place in the world” as a member of the Western “Free World”.

In addition, New Zealand sent military forces to fight in Cold War “hot conflicts” like the Korean War and the Malayan Emergency. By 1955, Southeast Asia had become the main focus of New Zealand’s defence policy but this interest was limited to the British colonies of Malaya (modern Malaysia) and Singapore; a process initiated by the previous Fraser Labour Government. Trade was not the main priority for the Holland Government’s increased

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8 In 1949, the outgoing Labour Prime Minister Peter Fraser had made New Zealand a party to the ANZAM (Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom in the Defence of Malaya) agreement and
engagement with the region but rather a desire to help prop up the British presence there.\textsuperscript{9} Holland publicly justified New Zealand’s involvement in the Malayan Emergency by presenting Malaya as the last place where New Zealand could help Britain “draw the line” against Communist expansion. This rationale arguably marked the introduction of the “Forward Defence” doctrine into New Zealand’s foreign and security policies towards Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{10}

In addition, New Zealand also participated in the Colombo Plan, a socio-economic development plan initiated by the United Kingdom in June 1950 to promote friendly relations between the wealthy “White Commonwealth” and Asian countries and to contain the spread of Communism in Asia.\textsuperscript{11} Thus under the Holland Government, the Domino Theory, the Collective Security and Forward Defence doctrines, and the Colombo Plan were firmly established as the four main pillars of New Zealand’s Cold War foreign and security policies towards Asia. Since New Zealand’s conservative, Western-aligned foreign policies clashed with the Bandung spirit of non-alignment and peaceful coexistence, Wellington was naturally suspicious of the upcoming Conference.

The Holland Government’s policy towards the Bandung Conference was also influenced by its stance on colonialism. In 1955, New Zealand administrated several Pacific Island trust territories: Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, the conservative National Party sought to maintain New Zealand’s close ties to the United Kingdom and the

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\textsuperscript{9} Until Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1968, New Zealand’s main trading partners were Western Europe, the United States, and Japan. See McKinnon, \textit{Independence and Foreign Policy}, pp. 173.


British Commonwealth. It viewed the Commonwealth as an instrument for Britain to block the spread of Communism and radical nationalism within both its colonies and former colonies. While the National Party acquiesced to the “winds of change”, it sought to ensure that friendly pro-Western governments emerged in colonial dependencies being prepared for self-rule like Malaya, Singapore, and New Zealand’s own trust territory of Western Samoa. While the left-leaning opposition Labour Party was more supportive of decolonisation and self-rule, it also opposed Communism and supported close ties with Britain. In addition, New Zealand’s Bandung stance reflected its origins as a British “settler colony” where British settlers had subjugated and assimilated the indigenous Māori tribes following the Land Wars of the 19th century. While New Zealand claimed to have the “best race relations in the world” and Māori did enjoy the same legal rights and protections as European New Zealanders, they still lagged behind socio-economically. While New Zealand did not officially pursue a racially-exclusive policy like the White Australia Policy, Wellington still actively discouraged immigration by Asians, Africans, and southern European nationalities. Reflecting these sentiments, a Department of External Affairs (NZDEA) memorandum published in 1953 reiterated that New Zealand “should remain a country of European development.” Though New Zealand accommodated a substantial number of Asian students under the Colombo Plan, it did not welcome large-scale Asian immigration until 1974. Thus, New Zealand’s national identity as a European “offshoot” along with its Western-aligned foreign and security policies would influence its stance towards the Bandung Conference, a topic discussed below.

The Western alliance and New Zealand’s decision-making process

Most of New Zealand’s dealings with the Bandung Conference were conducted through the Department of External Affairs (NZDEA), the country’s foreign ministry which had been established by the Fraser Labour Government in 1943 to give New Zealand a voice in Allied decision-making during World War II. The nascent NZDEA was still attached to the Prime Minister’s Department (PMD) with the Prime Minister traditionally occupying the External Affairs portfolio. However, Sidney Holland had little interest in foreign affairs and instead delegated that role to a succession of three different ministers. By 1955, Thomas Macdonald was New Zealand’s Minister of External Affairs, having been appointed after the November 1954 general election. Meanwhile, the NZDEA’s functional operations were run by a senior civil servant named Alister D. McIntosh, who served concurrently as the Secretary (official head) of External Affairs and Permanent Head of the PMD.16 Reflecting New Zealand’s subordinate relationship with Britain, the NZDEA was named “external affairs” rather than “foreign affairs” in deference of Whitehall’s leading role in conducting foreign policy on behalf of the Commonwealth.17 While New Zealand expanded its diplomatic contacts with Asia during the 1950s, the “Near North” was still seen as “somewhere to keep away from: different, exotic, and dangerous.”18 This attitude would guide Wellington’s policy towards Bandung. New Zealand also developed its policy towards Bandung in consultation with its three main allies: Australia, Britain, and the United States.

16 Thomas Macdonald’s predecessors were Frederick Doidge and Thomas Clifton Webb. See McKinnon, Independence and Foreign Policy, pp. 114-15.
From the onset, Australian and New Zealand foreign affairs officials were monitoring the planning of the Bandung Conference and discussing the question of their attendance. In October 1954, McIntosh received a letter from Charles Craw, the head of the NZDEA’s Far Eastern Section, who had been in contact with the Australian Department of External Affairs (ADEA) and was aware of their dilemma about Australian attendance at Bandung. The Australian High Commission in New Delhi had suggested that Canberra attend the conference to prevent the discussion of subjects which Australia did not like such as the West New Guinea dispute. In light of this situation, Craw advised his superior to “steer clear of embroilment in this and similar conferences.”

In response to Craw’s letter, McIntosh instructed the New Zealand High Commission in Canberra to tell his ADEA counterparts that New Zealand had no interest in participating in the conference as an “Asian country” or otherwise. In response to press coverage about Nehru’s outspoken support for Australasian attendance, Macdonald opined that Australian and New Zealand attendance could be a “source of embarrassment” because neither country was an “Asian state” and the Conference’s potentially anti-Western agenda. He argued that it would be better for the two antipodean governments to discuss colonialism and economic assistance at a more “representational forum” like the United Nations rather than the proposed Bandung Conference, which he termed an “Asian pressure group.”

Besides reflecting the close sibling relationship between the two antipodean governments, these exchanges showed that New Zealand did not consider itself to be part of Asia; a stance which harked back to the Fraser

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Labour Government’s reluctant participant in the Inter-Asian Conference of 1949.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, these correspondences showed that the Holland Government’s stance towards Bandung was influenced by the advice of NZDEA officials.

In contrast to Wellington’s blank refusal to send any official delegation to the Bandung Conference, their ADEA counterparts considered attending the conference due to Australia’s greater interest in Asian affairs. However, the ADEA’s desire to attend the Bandung Conference was motivated by a pro-Western agenda which involved: firstly, preventing the conference from passing unfavourable resolutions against the Colombo Plan and SEATO; secondly, diluting the resolutions condemning South Africa’s Apartheid policy, and British and Dutch colonialism in Malaya and West New Guinea respectively; and thirdly, preventing China and India from dominating the smaller “neutralist countries.” In an NZDEA briefing paper prepared for the Prime Minister’s Conference in January 1955, an NZDEA official concluded that their Australian counterparts’ motivation for attending the Bandung Conference was “to infiltrate a pressure group of Asian and Middle East States.” Since he reasoned that Australia and New Zealand did not belong in Asia, the NZDEA analyst surmised that it was better for the two antipodean countries to stay away from the conference and to instead let “responsible” Asian countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, and Turkey influence the conference in a “moderate direction.”\textsuperscript{24} Ultimately, the question of Australian attendance was finally resolved when Jakarta formally excluded Australia.\textsuperscript{25} The ADEA’s stance on Bandung differed from that of the Coalition Menzies Government which viewed the Conference’s neutralist and pro-disarmament


agenda as a threat to its Western-aligned foreign and security policies towards Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{26}

The above diplomatic exchanges probably reflected some measure of disagreement between the ADEA and the Menzies Government.

Another government that influenced New Zealand’s attitudes and policies towards the Bandung Conference was the United Kingdom. Due to New Zealand’s extensive political, military, and economic ties to the “Mother Country”, Whitehall still exerted a substantial influence over Wellington’s foreign and security policies towards Southeast Asia. Thus, New Zealand sought to keep in step with the “Mother Country.” After some considerable unease among British foreign, commonwealth and colonial policy-makers, Whitehall finally opted for a two-pronged policy of allowing their colonial subjects to send delegates to the Conference while simultaneously working indirectly with friendly governments like Turkey to promote a favourable view of the West.\textsuperscript{27} British policy towards Banding was conveyed to Wellington in a letter received by Foss Shanahan, the Deputy Secretary of External Affairs, in mid-January 1955.\textsuperscript{28} Consequently, Whitehall’s decision merely reinforced New Zealand’s decision to stay aloof from the Bandung Conference.

Last but not least was the United States; New Zealand’s other major ally. As a global superpower, the Eisenhower Administration saw the Bandung Conference through Cold War lens. The United States had engineered the creation of SEATO in September 1954 to contain

\textsuperscript{26} For a longer discussion, see Waters, “Lost opportunity,” pp-76-81.
\textsuperscript{28} Letter from C.M. Maclehose, United Kingdom High Commission Wellington to Foss Shanahan, Prime Minister’s Department, 18 January 1955, PM 440/9/3, Part 1, ANZ, Wellington;
Communist expansion in Southeast Asia following the First Indochina War.\textsuperscript{29} Since the Colombo Five had organized the Bandung Conference in opposition to Washington’s efforts to corral Asian countries into an anti-China alliance, State Department officials feared that the Conference preceded a leftward ideological shift among the newly independent Afro-Asian countries that would benefit Beijing’s ambitions.\textsuperscript{30} American wariness towards Bandung was reflected in diplomatic correspondence between the New Zealand Embassy in Washington, D.C. and their NZDEA superiors in Wellington. According to the New Zealand Ambassador George Laking, the State Department had opted for a policy of “damage control” by encouraging friendly Asian countries like Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan to attend the Conference in order to draft resolutions favourable to SEATO and to offset anti-Western criticisms.\textsuperscript{31} In a responding telegram posted on 10 February 1955, the External Affairs Minister Macdonald observed that Washington’s policy to Bandung was similar to the British policy. However, Macdonald and his NZDEA colleagues disagreed with the American proposal of using these friendly Asian states to manipulate the proceedings in favour of Western security interests; reasoning that such tactics could provide the Communists with evidence of Western subterfuge. While Wellington accepted the American suggestion that they discuss with their Asian SEATO partners about what stance they would take at Bandung, they rejected the assumption that SEATO should naturally be antagonistic to the Asian-African Conference’s activities.\textsuperscript{32} During the SEATO meeting held at Bangkok in February 23-25, the New Zealand delegate, at the suggestion of the Americans, sponsored a resolution inviting the Thai, Filipino, and Pakistani members (whose governments

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\footnotetext[31]{New Zealand Ambassador Washington to Minister of External Affairs Wellington, Telegram No. 58, 1 February 1955, PM 440/9/3, Part 1, ANZ, Wellington.}
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would be participating at the Bandung Conference), to extend greetings to the other “free countries” there and urge them to share SEATO’s dedication to the Pacific Charter. This resolution was intended to allay suspicions that SEATO was mutually hostile to the Bandung’s aspirations.\textsuperscript{33} By early March 1955, the State Department had opted for a policy of providing “friendly countries” attending the Conference with information about Communist excesses and atrocities to counteract pro-Communist propaganda.\textsuperscript{34} These diplomatic correspondences showed New Zealand’s growing status as a junior ally of the United States and how Wellington’s subscription to Washington’s Cold War worldview; two things that would have serious ramifications for New Zealand’s relationship with the United States during the Vietnam War.

**A Distant Observer**

Despite Indonesia’s avowed opposition to any Australian and New Zealand attendance at Bandung, George Laking reported on 18 February that the Indian and Indonesian embassies in Washington were telling American newsmen that their governments desired Australia and New Zealand’s attendance. Laking suggested that the Indians and Indonesians wanted to send press messages to Canberra and Wellington in the hope of getting the Australasian foreign ministers to state that their countries had not been invited, thus enabling the Colombo Five to rectify this omission. While Indian and Indonesian diplomats in Washington stated that Australia and New Zealand were welcome to attend since they were geographically near Asia, Laking mentioned the US State Department believed that this was merely a ploy to justify inviting the Soviet Union to Bandung. In the end, Laking surmised that inviting Australia and New Zealand would open the door to inviting the “Big Four” powers – the Soviet Union, Britain, the United States, and France; an unwelcome prospect for the Colombo Five organizers. Given the political


complexities involved, Laking’s telegram insinuated that it would be politically unwise for New Zealand and Australia to accept any invitations to the Bandung Conference.\(^{35}\)

On 24 March 1955, the Australian media carried a press statement by an Indonesian diplomat in Washington stating that Jakarta would welcome Australian and New Zealand observers provided that they apply for accreditation with the five-nation Steering Committee (which comprised the Colombo Powers). In response, the NZDEA conceded that it would be difficult for Wellington to turn down a formal invitation to participate as an observer given New Zealand’s recent resolution at the February SEATO conference in Bangkok. The NZDEA decided to persuade their Australian counterparts to limit their participation to an observer role.\(^{36}\)

That same day, Walter Nash, the leader of the opposition Labour Party, talked about the upcoming conference during an address to the New Zealand House of Representatives. Citing the tide of decolonisation sweeping through Asia and Africa, he inquired whether the Government would be sending observers to monitor the Afro-Asian talks.\(^{37}\) Nash’s stance on Bandung was paralleled by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) which took a more sympathetic stance to the Conference than the Menzies Coalition Government and even advocated sending an unofficial Australian delegation to observe the conference proceedings.\(^{38}\) In response to the print media and Nash’s inquiries about whether New Zealand should seek observer status at the upcoming Conference, the External Affairs Minister Tom MacDonald issued a press statement that New Zealand had been issued no official invitation in Bandung but would consider any such opportunity.\(^{39}\) However, in private, the Government was opposed to any form of New Zealand


\(^{38}\) In Australia, the word “labour” is spelled “labor”. Waters, ‘Lost opportunity’, pp. 80-83.

participation at Bandung. Ultimately, the question of New Zealand participation at Bandung in any form was rendered moot when Wellington received no official invitation to participate as an observer.

While no Western officials attended the Bandung Conference in any official capacity, several Western embassies in Jakarta sent personnel to Bandung. In addition, several Western private citizens including the Greek-Cypriot Archbishop Makarios, the African-American Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, the African-American ex-Communist writer Richard Wright, the Cornell University Professor George Kahin, the ALP member and Australian diplomat John Burton, and the Australian National University Professor C.P. Fitzgerald attended the proceedings as observers. Following a query by an interested Mosgiel resident named J.N. Stephens, Macdonald reiterated in late April that New Zealand had not been invited to participate or observe the Bandung Conference. Unlike other countries like Australia, New Zealand was unable to send diplomats to monitor the proceedings since it lacked any diplomatic representation in Indonesia; New Zealand’s interests in Indonesia were represented by the British embassy in Jakarta until 1961. Despite the NZDEA’s disengaged stance on Bandung, its in-house journal *External Affairs Review* still reproduced the Conference’s final communique in its April 1955 issue. But the journal’s decision to allocate more space to New Zealand’s Malayan and SEATO commitments reflected the country’s Western-aligned foreign and security policies. In short,
New Zealand’s refusal to send any official delegation or observers to the Bandung Conference reflected its adherence to Western collective security agreements, suspicion of non-alignment, and its limited diplomatic presence in Asia.

Two developments that caught the interest of New Zealand diplomats and policy-makers were the Bandung debates around Communism and the involvement of participants in Western collective security pacts like SEATO and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). From Washington, Laking reported that his State Department counterparts thought that the Western-aligned Asian states had succeeded in turning the Bandung Conference to the advantage of the United States and its allies; citing the vigorous attacks on Communism and the “relatively satisfactory nature of the final communique.” In his view, the presence of these Asian allies moderated anti-Western sentiment at the conference and prevented the passage of resolutions harmful to Anglo-American strategic interests. In addition, Laking regarded the inclusion of the clause allowing membership in defence pacts as a triumph for the United States and its Western allies since it allowed their Asian allies like Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines to continue participating in Western security pacts like SEATO and CENTO. Laking regarded this favourable development as a setback for Nehru, Zhou, and the other neutralist leaders; who were opposed to such Western collective security pacts. However, Laking also conceded that Bandung was a diplomatic triumph for Zhou and Communist China; citing Zhou’s friendly demeanour and avowed willingness to resolve disputes through diplomacy.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, G.D.L. White, the Official Secretary at the New Zealand High Commission in London, reported there was a strong anti-colonial sentiment at Bandung; citing the discussion of colonial issues like West New Guinea, French colonialism in North Africa, and the Arab-
Israeli conflict. While acknowledging the success of Premier Zhou’s diplomacy, White contended that “the conference as a whole showed no sign of falling for Communist lures in spite of his adroit conciliatory lures.” Despite the bickering, he concluded that the conference succeeded with its main purpose of consolidating Afro-Asian relations.\(^{46}\) The cautiously optimistic tone of Laking and Whites’ reports were echoed by other Australian and British diplomatic reports.\(^{47}\) The vocal attacks on Communism by several delegates dispelled initial fears that the conference would degenerate into an anti-Western Communist propaganda platform. The compromise clause allowing Afro-Asian countries to participate in collective security alliances was seen as a safeguard for Western security pacts in Asia and the Middle East.

In a more negative tone, Leslie Munro, New Zealand’s Permanent Representative to the UN, surmised that Communist China’s diplomatic triumph at Bandung would renew its efforts to secure a seat in the United Nations; a development which threatened Washington’s support for General Chiang Kai Shek’s Republic of China (ROC) regime in Taiwan. The pessimistic tone of Munro’s report was influenced by a meeting with one of the Bandung delegates, the pro-Western Lebanese Ambassador Charles Malik. In his report, Munro reiterated Malik’s views that Australia and New Zealand were isolated Christian Western outposts in Southeast Asia and suggested that the two Anglophone countries had been excluded due to their restrictive immigration policies.\(^{48}\) While Munro’s report perpetuated the dominant view within NZDEA circles that New Zealand was not part of Asia, it also reflected his own hawkish, pro-Western Cold War outlook. These reports showed how New Zealand’s security priorities around containing Communism and upholding the Western security alliance system guided its

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perceptions of Bandung. Most importantly, they revealed the extent to which New Zealand’s Western allies influenced its foreign and security policies.

Following the Bandung Conference, the External Affairs Minister Macdonald issued a press statement on 26 April 1955 praising the cordial atmosphere of the conference proceedings which he hoped would dispel fears that the Conference would become a “propaganda forum” for Communist China to threaten “democratic and peace-loving peoples.” Macdonald also hoped that the conference discussions would remove misunderstandings between the various Afro-Asian countries and make “a positive contribution to international goodwill.” However, in the absence of official information about the conference other than media coverage, the Minister admitted he was in no position to make any substantial comment. Macdonald also recalled that the New Zealand SEATO delegation had proposed a successful resolution asking the three Asian SEATO members to convey the organisation’s cordial greetings to the other “free countries” there and to defend freedom and liberty at the Bandung Conference. While acknowledging the conference participants’ strong objection to colonialism, Macdonald urged supporters of decolonisation to recognise the good that colonial powers had done. In Macdonald’s view, Britain was the colonial power with the best record in dealing with its colonial subjects; citing Whitehall’s policy of granting various measures of self-rule to its Asian and African dependencies. Finally, the Minister reiterated his Government’s commitment to support self-government and decolonisation in accordance with the South East Asian Collective Defence Treaty’s Pacific Charter. Macdonald’s remarks on decolonisation reflected Wellington’s preference for peaceful “political evolution” over violent “armed revolution.” Most importantly, his press statement shed light on contemporary New Zealand foreign policy priorities. New Zealand was still closely tied culturally, politically, and economically to “Mother Britain” while

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Communism (represented in this case by Communist China) was viewed as a threat to both regional and New Zealand’s own security. Rather than engaging with Asian regional organizations, Wellington still preferred to work with organizations that had been established by the Western powers such as the Colombo Plan and SEATO.\(^{50}\)

**Media coverage**

Despite the Holland Government’s objections to New Zealand’s attendance at the Bandung Asian-African Conference, media coverage of the upcoming conference between December 1954 and early April 1955 fuelled some public speculation about whether New Zealand would be attending the Bandung Conference in any official or unofficial capacity.\(^{51}\) Media commentary was largely pessimistic with several mainstream newspapers disparaging the Conference as a reverse “colour-bar” club that excluded White people and a potential forum for anti-Western propaganda.\(^{52}\) There were concerns that the Bandung Conference’s proposal to discuss West New Guinea would have implications on both Australia and New Zealand’s policies to that dispute.\(^{53}\) By contrast, George Jackson, the Communist Party’s National Chairman, gave a favourable view of the Bandung Conference in the *People’s Voice* and decried New Zealand’s involvement in Western defence pacts.\(^{54}\) The CPNZ’s views were however in the minority since its staunch opposition to New Zealand’s pro-Western alignment went against the tide of mainstream public opinion during the 1950s, which still supported the Government’s foreign and security policies.

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50 Rolfe, ‘Coming to Terms with Regional Identity’, pp. 33-37
While the New Zealand Government maintained a low profile during the Bandung Conference, the conference proceedings elicited some mixed but not unfriendly reactions from the mainstream New Zealand print media. While the conservative Auckland morning paper New Zealand Herald reflected on the challenges and possibilities facing the Bandung Conference, the more liberal evening paper, the Auckland Star, lamented that New Zealand had failed to send observers to a Conference which had the potential to “affect the course of history.”  

The Wellington morning paper The Dominion commented on the irony that a gathering of anti-colonial Afro-Asian countries used English as their medium of communication and surmised that English had become the international lingua franca. Meanwhile, the Wellington Evening Post argued that the Bandung Conference marked an important turning point in history where Western nations would have to relate to Asian and African countries on equal terms. The Post’s editor welcomed the Indian Prime Minister Nehru’s final appeal for Australia and New Zealand to become more closely associated with Asia. The Post also editorialised that New Zealand’s destiny would be linked to events in Asia and surmised that New Zealand needed to expand relations with that continent. He added the New Zealanders could help their Asian neighbours to solve their many problems “without being charged with seeking domination and our own self-interest.”

On a less optimistic note, the Dunedin morning paper Otago Daily Times described the Bandung Conference as a “conference without unity” due to the irreconcilable differences between the pro-Western, neutralist, and Communist countries. The ODT editorialist also argued that a significant anti-Western current dominated the proceedings; citing the unwillingness of many of the delegates to condemn Soviet “colonialism” on the same terms as Western colonialism. In spite of such harsher views, the mainstream print media recognised that

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56 Editorial 1955, ‘They Say It In English’, Dominion, 23 April.
Bandung was a pivotal event that foreshadowed Asia’s growing importance in New Zealand’s strategic considerations.

One issue that dominated New Zealand newspaper coverage of Bandung was Communist China’s participation in the conference. Toeing Washington’s line, Wellington had adopted a policy of non-recognition towards the PRC regime in Beijing; instead recognising the ROC regime in Taiwan as the legitimate government of China. At the time, New Zealand and its Western allies viewed Communist China as a security threat. 59 Despite initial fears that the PRC would turn the Conference into an anti-Western platform and bully its smaller Asian neighbours, The Press (Christchurch) and Evening Post were mollified by the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai’s conciliatory tone throughout the conference proceedings.60 During his inaugural speech, Zhou stressed that the Chinese delegation had come to Bandung “to seek unity and not to quarrel” and took great pains to assure his Southeast Asian neighbours that the PRC respected the religious liberties of its minorities and harboured no aggressive tendencies towards the region.61 While praising the Chinese Premier’s tactful diplomacy and expressed interest in seeking a diplomatic solution to the First Taiwan Straits Crisis with the Americans, the ODT and the NZH surmised that Beijing had to put its words into actions given its past “aggression”.62 On a dissenting note, the Auckland Star argued that the Americans should not dismiss Zhou’s Bandung offer and instead faulted Washington’s hard-headed policy towards Beijing for stoking the Taiwan Straits

62 Editorial 1955, ‘Conference without Unity’, ODT, 26 April; Editorial 1955, ‘Astute Chinese Diplomacy’, NZH, 26 April; The First Taiwan Straits Crisis (1954-55) was sparked by the presence of Republic of China (ROC) troops in the islands of Quemoy and Matsu, which lay outside the shield provided by the US Seventh Fleet. See Mackie, Bandung 1955, pp. 49-50.
Crisis. Ultimately, the Eisenhower Administration declined to respond to Zhou’s offer; leaving Sino-American tensions to simmer until Richard Nixon’s landmark trip to Beijing in 1973 facilitated Washington’s recognition of the PRC in 1979. Newspaper editorial commentary showed that the mainstream media shared the New Zealand Government’s threat perceptions towards Communist China, which stemmed from Wellington’s opposition to the expansion of Communism in Asia. Due to New Zealand’s bipolar worldview of international relations, the Cold War was never absent from newspaper discourses of the Bandung Conference.

Newspaper cartoons tended to take a dim view of the Bandung Conference. The ODT cartoonist Sid Scales penned a cartoon disparaging Afro-Asian delegates for not recognising the positive aspects of European colonialism. The image of an exhausted White colonial official bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders while gleeful Afro-Asian delegates looked on, accompanied by the caption “Perhaps now we can share the white man’s burden,” implied that former colonial subjects should be grateful for the social and economic development introduced by their “hated” former White colonial masters. While reflecting contemporary New Zealand society’s sympathies towards “Mother Britain”, Scales’ cartoon conveniently ignored the violence, racism, and exploitation created by British colonialism. The conservative NZH also published a cartoon by the liberal British Guardian newspaper which mocked the Bandung organizers’ goal of keeping newly independent Asian countries out of the Cold War. The sight of Asian delegates huddling on an island in the midst of an artillery barrage between China and a US warship (a reference to the ongoing First Taiwan Straits Crisis) insinuated that the Bandung Spirit of non-alignment and peaceful coexistence was doomed to have little impact in easing

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63 Editorial 1955, ‘Chinese offer should not be dismissed’, Auckland Star, 26 April.
65 Scales, S 1955, ‘Perhaps now we can share the White Man’s Burden’, cartoon, ODT, 21 April.
Cold War tensions.67 These two cartoons conveyed the West’s dismissive attitudes towards the Bandung Conference as either a hotbed of anti-Western sentiment or a naïve, idealistic attempt to end the Cold War. Such attitudes ignored the fact that Afro-Asian countries wanted to determine their own political destinies free of Western or Communist interference. In short, the mainstream newspapers’ coverage of Bandung reflected their acceptance of the Holland Government’s Western-aligned foreign and security policies and their paternalistic, colonialist attitudes towards Asian peoples.

**Left-wing responses**

The Bandung Conference also attracted substantial interest from left-wing elements in New Zealand, most notably the Communist Party of New Zealand and the left-wing New Zealand Peace Councils (NZPC), as well as well-informed individuals like W.H. Youren. Founded in 1919, New Zealand’s Communist Party (CPNZ) was mainly supported by trade unionists and left-wing intellectuals. Throughout its history, it remained politically marginalised and failed to capture any seats in New Zealand’s unicameral Parliament. In a time of escalating Cold War tensions, the CPNZ were often viewed as apologists and proxies for the Soviet Union and Communist China.68 The New Zealand Peace Council was a left-wing peace and anti-nuclear organization that had been formed in 1950 from the Peace and Anti-Conscription League, which had emerged to oppose the growing militarism in New Zealand leading up to World War I.69 The NZPC was affiliated with the World Peace Council (WPC), a Stockholm-based organization which had been established by several intellectuals in 1950 to promote world peace and nuclear disarmament. Like the more militant CPNZ, the NZPC was criticized for its alleged pro-Soviet

67 ‘Important Observers’ 1955, cartoon, NZH, 19 April.
The Communist Party and the Peace Council disseminated their arguments and reports through their official organs: the weekly newspaper *People's Voice* and the monthly newsletter *Peace* respectively.

Reflecting their ideological opposition to Wellington’s staunchly pro-Western foreign policy, both the *People's Voice* and *Peace* welcomed the Bandung Conference as an alternative to Western militarism in Southeast Asia. Giving substantial coverage to the Bandung Conference, the *People's Voice* published several reports and editorials presenting the Conference as an alternative to the “imperialist” American-led SEATO alliance, a peaceful meeting of Asian and African countries, and a “cry for freedom” against the twin devils of Western imperialism and capitalism. In addition, the *PV* hailed the Bandung Conference as a blow against American and British imperialism. It also accepted Chinese and Indian assertions that the 1955 *Kashmir Princess* airplane disaster had been an act of sabotage by the British authorities in Hong Kong and the ROC regime. The CPNZ’s General Secretary Victor G. Wilcox also described the Bandung Conference as a “milestone” in the road to achieving world peace through peaceful negotiation and mutual understanding.

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72 Editorial 1955, ‘US retreats before public opinion’, *People's Voice*, 4 May; ‘Time-bomb cause wreck of plane bound for Bandung’ 1955, *People's Voice*, 15 June; The *Kashmir Princess* was an Air India plane chartered to fly the Chinese delegation from Hong Kong to Jakarta on 11 Apr. 1955 that crashed near Natuna Island in Indonesian waters. All crew and passengers aboard were killed and sabotage was suspected on the part of the Western powers and the ROC regime. Declassified records have since indicated that the ROC secret service had planted a time-bomb on the plane in an attempt to kill Premier Zhou Enlai. In addition, opponents of the PRC regime have alleged that Zhou had foreknowledge of the planned plane bombing but had allowed the incident to take place to gain political capital against the Western powers and ROC regime. See ‘China marks journalists killed in premier murder plot 50 years ago’ 2005, *Xinhua*, 4 November, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-04/11/content_2815170.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-04/11/content_2815170.htm); Finnane, A 2010, ‘Zhou Enlai in Bandung: film as history in the People's Republic of China,’ in D McDougall and A Finnane (eds.), *Bandung 1955: little histories*, Monash University Press, Melbourne, pp. 116-18.

Peace hailed the Bandung Conference as a sign that the Afro-Asian peoples, who comprised the majority of the world’s population, genuinely supported the principles of peaceful coexistence, negotiation, and opposition to nuclear weapons. Like the CPNZ, the NZPC opposed New Zealand’s involvement in the Malayan Emergency and participation in Western “collective security” pacts like ANZUS and SEATO. In their attitudes to the Bandung Conference, both the CPNZ and NZPC viewed newly-independent Afro-Asian anti-colonial leaders as fellow allies against the twin devils of Western imperialism and capitalism.

Last but not least, the Bandung Conference drew the interest of the Christchurch Convention on International Relations held in August 1955, which was well attended by 300 academics, trade unionists, peace activists and interested members of the public. The Christchurch Convention dealt with three broad themes: the Commonwealth, the United Nations and Southeast Asia. It came up with three main planks which condemned all forms of racism and discrimination in the Commonwealth, urged New Zealand to work more through the United Nations, and lastly condemned colonialism and supported decolonisation. While Bandung was not a major topic at the Christchurch Convention, the Convention’s organisers urged New Zealand to take notice of the Bandung Conference in their findings and also published the final communique of the Asian-African Conference.

One speaker Harold Wilfred Youren, a prominent Hawke’s Bay lawyer, farmer, and NZPC member, presented a paper arguing that the Bandung Conference represented: firstly, an explicit rejection of Western assumptions of moral superiority; and secondly; a resurgence of the

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historical Asian cultural and trading connections which had been severed by the advent of European colonialism. There was also renewed sense of pride in Asian culture and thinking. Due to their vast size, Youren argued that China and India would be able to exert a substantial influence over the other Afro-Asian countries; adding that the two countries practised different political models. The Indian model, advocated by Prime Minister Nehru and his Foreign Minister Krishnan Menon, sought to avoid Cold War entanglements by creating a bloc of “non-aligned” Asian countries. Meanwhile, the Chinese were developing a political governance model that was a fusion of Marxist ideas and traditional Chinese culture and traditions. The Chinese had rejected Western forms of governance due to its association with the political anarchy, warlordism, corruption, and civil war of the past forty years. While there was potential for conflict between the Indian and Chinese models, Youren hoped that a “new synthesis of foreign and domestic values” would emerge out of “the present ferment of ideas.” He cited Burma’s nation-building policies of reconciling Buddhism with socialism as a potential success story. Youren’s sympathetic views towards Bandung reflected those of the NZPC. While Youren rightfully foresaw the growing geopolitical influence of India and China, his hopes for Burma to develop into a “success story” proved unrealised due to the country’s ethnic and political conflicts which led to a military coup in 1962.

77 Youren, HW 1955, ‘Western Policies in South East Asia,’ Christchurch Conference on International Relations, pp. 85-88; H.W. Youren was also a humanitarian, civil libertarian, and peace advocate who participated in the New Zealand Peace Council, an affiliate of the pro-Soviet World Peace Council. He was also a vocal critic of the New Zealand Government’s containment policies towards China and involvement in the Vietnam War. Fluent in several languages, he regularly wrote letters to journals and newspapers, took part in radio broadcasts, discussions, seminars, lectures, and also wrote texts for Asian studies courses. Reflecting his affinity for Asia, he and his wife hosted Asian students at their farm in Waiti and also travelled widely. See Curham, B. D 2014, ‘Youren, Harold Wilfred’, from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 19 March 2014, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5v3/youren-harold-wilfred.


Ultimately, the New Zealand Government took little notice of the Bandung Conference due to its disagreement with Indonesia over the West New Guinea dispute and its steadfastly pro-Western foreign policy alignment. Despite Youren’s optimism, the Bandung vision for peaceful cooperative relations among Third World countries faltered due to the emergence of a split within the Afro-Asian bloc between a “moderate faction” led by India and Egypt and a radical faction led by Indonesia and China. These tensions culminated in the failed Second Asian-African Conference at Algiers in November 1965.\(^{80}\) Subsequent Asian conflicts like the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the Indonesian-Malaysian Confrontation, the Vietnam War, and the various Indo-Pakistani conflicts also undermined the Bandung spirit of peaceful coexistence and cooperation.

**Epilogue**

Firstly, New Zealand pursued a disengaged policy towards the Bandung Conference since the conference’s agenda conflicted with New Zealand’s contemporary foreign and security policies and perceived view of its place in the world. As of 1955, New Zealand’s foreign and security policies sought to preserve a significant Anglo-American presence in Southeast Asia in order to contain the spread of Asian Communism into Australasia. Since New Zealand policy-makers shared their Anglophone counterparts’ anti-Communist security concerns, they naturally distrusted anything that questioned their traditional Cold War assumptions. Hence, alarm bells were raised at the presence of Communist China and North Vietnam at the Bandung Conference. Such considerations also led New Zealand and its Western allies to collaborate with friendly Asian states like Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan in countering anti-Western and pro-Communist propaganda.\(^{81}\) In addition, New Zealand’s aversion towards Bandung reflected

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\(^{80}\) Mackie, *Bandung 1955*, pp. 103-123; For a longer discussion, see Agung, *Twenty years Indonesian foreign policy*, pp. 313-55.

\(^{81}\) New Zealand High Commissioner Canberra to Minister of External Affairs Wellington, Telegram No. 43, 11 February 1955, PM 440/9/3, Part 1, ANZ, Wellington.
its own origins as a British settler colony. New Zealand saw itself as a Western country that was still closely tied to “Mother Britain.” The following year, New Zealand was one of the few countries to support Britain during the Suez Crisis; a stance that put it strongly at odds with many Afro-Asian and Communist countries, and even the United States.\(^2\) New Zealand’s Western-aligned policies and identity would later entail its involvement in the Indonesian-Malaysian Confrontation and the Vietnam War; wars that were fought to protect British and American interests in Southeast Asia.

Secondly, the Holland Government’s dismissive attitude towards the Bandung Conference was little different from that of its three major Anglophone allies and security partners; countries whose vested strategic interests in Asia clashed with the Bandung spirit of peaceful coexistence, non-alignment, and self-determination. Due to its closer proximity to Southeast Asia, Australia was compelled to take a greater interest in Bandung than Wellington; which could take a more detached interest from a “safe distance.” Unlike the NZDEA, the ADEA toyed with the idea of attending Bandung in order to prevent the Conference from passing resolutions that were hostile to Australian security policies. Only Jakarta’s firm objections to any Australasian participation put an end to this “pipe dream.” Meanwhile, Britain and the United States’ preoccupation with combating Communism led these two governments to view the Bandung Conference as a Cold War battleground. Thus, Washington, with the connivance of Whitehall and Wellington, tried to influence the conference proceedings by using friendly Asian states as proxies. Despite initial fears, Bandung did not devolve into a forum for bashing the West and propagating Communist propaganda. Instead, it represented an idealistic call by Asian and African leaders for greater cooperation among Third World countries.

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Thirdly, Bandung revealed the absolute limits of New Zealand’s foreign policy in Asia. While the Holland Government had shown a growing appreciation of New Zealand’s close proximity to Southeast Asia, its interests in that region were mainly limited to the Colombo Plan, support for the British position in Malaya and Singapore, and the backup to both provided by the US-inspired SEATO alliance. Despite the NZDEA’s efforts to increase New Zealand’s diplomatic and economic presence in Southeast Asia, the “Near North” was still regarded as a foreign exotic place. The Department’s relatively small manpower also limited its ability to project a meaningful presence there. New Zealand’s lack of a diplomatic presence in Indonesia prevented the NZDEA from sending personnel to monitor the Conference’s proceedings. Instead, Wellington had to make up for that shortfall by relying on information from its overseas diplomatic network and its three Anglophone allies. Contemporary New Zealand diplomatic reports reiterated Wellington’s ongoing preoccupation with containing Communism and safeguarding the Western security alliances that were the pillars of its security policies.

Finally, the New Zealand print media’s coverage of the Bandung Conference was influenced by the wider public debate around colonialism and the Cold War. While many newspapers rightfully viewed the Conference as a watershed moment in both the histories of Southeast Asia and Afro-Asian relations, their coverage still reflected contemporary Cold War anxieties about Communism and China. There was also a patronising pro-colonialist discourse within elements of the mainstream print media which exaggerated the positive qualities of British colonialism. While New Zealand was coming to terms with the “winds of change” sweeping the Third World, it would not fully come to terms with its own colonial past and racist immigration policies until the 1970s. Meanwhile, left-wing groups like the Communist Party and the New Zealand Peace Council viewed Bandung’s proposed international order based on peaceful coexistence and non-alignment as an alternative to the bipolar Cold War arms race. The CPNZ
and NZPC criticized New Zealand’s close ties with to Britain and the United States, which they regarded as imperialist powers oppressing the Third Word. While H.W. Youren rightfully recognized that Bandung had sparked a renewed sense of pride and confidence among Asian countries, his hopes for a peaceful Asian order were dispelled by the harsh realities of realpolitik. While left-wing voices remained at the margins of New Zealand during the Bandung Conference, they gathered greater traction during the Vietnam War; which split New Zealand’s bipartisan foreign policy consensus, sparked the emergence of a vocal anti-war movement, and forced Wellington to reappraise its relationship with its “Near North.” 83

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