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The Collective Memory of Non-Aligned Movement in Serbia's Foreign Policy: A Path Dependence Analysis of Belgrade – Jakarta Relations

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Abstract: This article examines how three successive Serbian presidents – Boris Tadić, Tomislav Nikolić, and Aleksandar Vučić – have employed memory diplomacy by mobilising shared collective memories of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Serbia's relations with Indonesia. The central question is why this Cold War-era narrative persists across administrations with differing political orientations, despite significant global changes since the collapse of Yugoslavia. The analysis is guided by two theoretical frameworks: theories of collective memory and discursive and historical institutionalism, which are used to study path dependence. Analysis of 11 official documents from 2008 to 2024 indicates that, although each president adopted distinct communicative strategies, all consistently referenced historical friendship with Indonesia. Notably, the article finds that Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito and Indonesian president Sukarno, the principal figures associated with this shared history, are rarely mentioned by name. Instead, Serbian leaders use abstract concepts such as brotherhood and anti-imperialism, allowing them to harness the emotional resonance of history while avoiding domestic political controversy. The article concludes that Serbia invokes this historical memory not out of sentimentality, but as a calculated strategy to dissuade Indonesia from recognising Kosovo's independence.

Keywords: Serbia-Indonesia relations, collective memory, Non-Aligned Movement, discursive path dependence, memory diplomacy

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Introduction

In contemporary international politics, historical memory serves not merely as a passive repository of the past but as a strategic resource in foreign policymaking (Bell 2006). Political leaders routinely mobilise selective historical narratives, analogies, and commemorative discourses to legitimise current political agendas, construct diplomatic solidarity, and strengthen their bargaining positions in both bilateral and multilateral contexts. Klymenko and Siddi (2020) argue that foreign policy debates are saturated with references to historical events, with state actors actively reinterpreting and instrumentalising the past to advance present-day geopolitical objectives. Historical memory is therefore not politically neutral; it is curated, mobilised, and instrumentalised by state actors through the construction of strategic discourses that shape domestic legitimacy and international positioning (Müller 2002). The literature on memory politics and historical diplomacy increasingly shows how collective memory is exercised through historical analogies, nationalist narratives, selective remembrance, and even practices of forgetting to justify foreign policy decisions and influence international perceptions (Mälksoo 2015). Consequently, the politics of memory has become a critical analytical lens for understanding how states transform symbolic representations of the past into practical diplomatic capital in the present (Klymenko and Siddi 2020).

Building on the understanding of historical memory as a strategic diplomatic resource, the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) provides a key case study for examining the political continuity of historical narratives. The NAM emerged during the Cold War as an alternative geopolitical platform intended to counter the pressures of the bipolar alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union (Dinkel 2018). Rather than submitting to either bloc, newly independent states in Asia, Africa, and parts of the Global South sought to maintain political autonomy through the principles of neutrality, anti-imperialism, peaceful coexistence, and sovereign equality (Willetts 1978). The movement's origins can be traced to the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia, which established the ideological and diplomatic foundations for Afro-Asian solidarity and culminated in the formal institutionalisation of the NAM at the 1961 Belgrade Conference in Yugoslavia (Acharya 2016).

In this historical sequence, Indonesia and Yugoslavia played a crucial role, exemplified by the diplomatic cooperation between President Sukarno and President Josip Broz Tito, whose leadership helped transform the “Bandung spirit” into a global platform for non-alignment and decolonial diplomacy (Mišković, Fischer-Tiné, and Boškowska 2014). However, despite its historical significance, Western-centric international relations scholarship often depicts the Non-Aligned Movement as a politically obsolete Cold War relic whose strategic relevance declined after the collapse of bipolarity, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the emergence of the liberal international order after 1991. The end of the Cold War appeared to render the movement geopolitically marginal, relegating it to the periphery of international politics as attention shifted to institutions such as the Europe-

an Union, NATO, and other post-Cold War configurations of global governance (Sehgal 2019; Valiyev 2025).

Yet, the assumption that the NAM has lost its political relevance becomes increasingly difficult to sustain when examining Serbia's contemporary diplomacy towards Indonesia. Despite Serbia's strong orientation towards European Union accession and its gradual integration into Western institutional frameworks, Serbian political elites have consistently revived the symbolic legacy of Yugoslavia's relationship with Indonesia through the language of historical friendship, traditional partnership, and shared anti-colonial experiences. Rather than abandoning the diplomatic vocabulary inherited from the Yugoslav period, successive Serbian administrations have repeatedly invoked memories of the Tito–Sukarno era to reaffirm bilateral affinity and political trust. This continuity appears particularly puzzling given the considerable transformation of Serbia's domestic political order and geopolitical positioning after the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Gordy 1999).

Under Boris Tadić, Serbia adopted a broadly pro-European and liberal foreign policy orientation, emphasising democratic consolidation and EU integration (Subotić 2016). The administration of Tomislav Nikolić, by contrast, reflected a more nationalist and conservative posture, defined by a stronger emphasis on sovereignty, national identity, and strategic autonomy (Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015). Meanwhile, under Aleksandar Vučić, Serbian foreign policy has increasingly demonstrated pragmatic multi-directionalism, balancing relations between the European Union, Russia, China, and non-Western partners through a strategy frequently described as geopolitical hedging (Pavić and Beriša 2025). Despite these ideological and policy differences, a salient pattern remains across all three administrations: the recurrent mobilization of Yugoslavia's NAM legacy in diplomatic contacts with Indonesia. Such continuity raises a deeper analytical question: why has a Cold War historical narrative not just survived Serbia's post-socialist transformation but also remained politically functional across changing governments, along with geopolitical realities? Historical memory, as studies on memory politics suggest, often survives institutional rupture because it can be selectively repurposed to legitimize contemporary foreign policy interests and diplomatic positioning (Klymenko and Siddi 2020).

To systematically address this empirical puzzle, this article is guided by two interrelated research questions that explore both the discursive dynamics and the strategic logic underlying Serbia's foreign policy towards Indonesia. First, the article asks how the three successive Serbian presidents have articulated, reproduced, and adapted the collective memory of the NAM in their official bilateral engagements with Indonesia. Rather than assuming the persistence of historical narratives as politically self-evident, this question examines how references to Yugoslavia's NAM legacy are selectively framed, reinterpreted, and rhetorically mobilised across different political administrations and changing geopolitical contexts. Second, the article investigates why this discursive continuity has persisted despite substantial shifts in Serbia's domestic political orientation and external strategic environment. More specifically, it examines the geopolitical, domestic, and diplomatic rationales that explain both the continuity and variation of NAM-related dis-

course across the three presidencies. By addressing these two dimensions simultaneously, the article seeks not only to trace the transformation of historical memory in Serbian diplomatic rhetoric but also to explain the political functions that such memory serves in advancing Serbia's contemporary foreign policy interests towards Indonesia.

Literature Review

The dominant academic debate on contemporary Serbian foreign policy remains firmly rooted in the "Four Pillars" doctrine, a strategic orientation that positions Belgrade between the EU, the United States, Russia, and China. Within mainstream international relations scholarship, Serbia's foreign policy behaviour is often interpreted through the logic of strategic balancing, geopolitical hedging, and semi-peripheral survival in the post-Cold War Balkans. Existing studies generally depict Serbia as a post-conflict state navigating asymmetric external pressures while seeking to preserve diplomatic autonomy amid competing great-power influences (Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015; Jovanović 2019).

As a result, scholarly attention has largely focused on Serbia's EU accession process, its complex relationship with NATO, Russian soft power influence, and the growing economic presence of China in Southeast Europe (Ramet 2006). While these analyses offer important insights into Serbia's external positioning, they also reinforce a well-established great-power-centric analytical perspective that systematically marginalises Belgrade's engagement with actors beyond the Euro-Atlantic sphere (Stanković and Dabić 2026). By excessively privileging the gravitational pull of major powers, the literature implicitly frames Serbia's interactions with the Global South as peripheral diplomatic anomalies rather than as core elements of its broader foreign policy strategy.

Such Eurocentric framing obscures the extent to which Serbia continues to exercise strategic agency by mobilising historical diplomatic capital inherited from the Yugoslav era (Olick 2007). Consequently, the prevailing influence of symbolic and discursive ties built through the Non-Aligned Movement has remained significantly understudied within the broader literature on Serbian foreign policy. The limited scholarship examines Serbia's relations with Southeast Asia and the wider Balkan–ASEAN corridor. Existing studies tend to approach these interactions primarily through a transactional lens, reducing bilateral engagement to economic pragmatism, trade diversification, investment diplomacy, or hedging strategies aimed at mitigating Western dependency (Liu 2024).

Within this perspective, Serbia's outreach to Asian partners is often interpreted as a post-2008 economic adaptation strategy rather than a historically embedded diplomatic project. Such instrumentalist interpretations fail to grasp the deeper sociopolitical foundations underpinning Serbia's relations with countries such as Indonesia, whose bilateral ties with Belgrade were historically defined by anti-colonial solidarity, Third World internationalism, and the institutional legacy of the NAM (Mackie 2005). By framing Serbia's

contemporary engagement with Southeast Asia solely through the prism of economic utility and market access, the literature neglects the continuing ideological resonance and symbolic continuity accumulated during the Cold War period (Lee 2010). This reductionist tendency creates a significant empirical blind spot by overlooking how historical narratives continue to structure diplomatic contacts in the present. Consequently, prevailing explanations remain insufficient to understand why Serbian leaders consistently invoke the language of “historical friendship,” “traditional partnership,” and the shared NAM heritage in official engagements with Indonesia, despite profound geopolitical transformations after the collapse of Yugoslavia.

To move beyond these predominantly transactional frameworks, this article draws on Memory Studies, which conceptualises collective memory not as a static residue of the past, but as a socially constructed, politically contested, and continuously reinterpreted phenomenon (Halbwachs 1992; Olick 1999). Within this perspective, memory functions as an active repository of narratives that political actors can strategically mobilise to legitimise contemporary geopolitical objectives (Assmann 2008; Ivaniš, Kočan, and Zupančič 2025). Historical memory therefore operates not only as symbolic remembrance but as a diplomatic resource capable of generating legitimacy, solidarity, and international alignment. In the Serbian context, the political mobilisation of historical narratives is closely linked to the state’s search for ontological security, particularly following the existential rupture caused by Kosovo’s declaration of independence (Ejdus 2020).

Narratives of historical coherence and international solidarity help stabilise Serbia’s sense of identity amid persistent anxieties regarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international recognition. To examine how such narratives persist across changing political administrations, this article combines Discursive Institutionalism with Historical Institutionalism, particularly the concept of path dependence (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2000; Schmidt 2008). This synthesis enables the article to conceptualize what may be termed “discursive path dependence,” a condition in which historically institutionalised narratives constrain, shape, and reproduce future diplomatic articulations over time. In this context, the memory of Yugoslavia’s Non-Aligned legacy does not merely survive as passive nostalgia; rather, it is strategically repackaged and regularly adapted to support Serbia’s contemporary foreign policy objectives. The need for this varied conceptual framework is further confirmed through bibliometric mapping of the existing scholarly discourse. As shown in the VOSviewer visualisation below, the academic literature on Indonesia–Yugoslavia/Serbia relations published between 2000 and 2026 remains highly fragmented and compartmentalised (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Academic literature on Indonesia–Yugoslavia/Serbia relations published between 2000 and 2026. **Source:** Authors using VosViewer

The bibliometric network reveals several isolated clusters operating within distinct intellectual silos. One dominant cluster focuses on economic cooperation, political pragmatism, and bilateral trade relations, while another concentrates on international law, sovereignty, and human rights issues related to Kosovo. A separate historical cluster addresses the legacy of the NAM, primarily within the context of Cold War diplomacy and postcolonial internationalism. Notably, the visualisation shows an almost complete absence of intersection between scholarship on collective memory, the NAM legacy, and Serbia's contemporary sovereignty diplomacy regarding Kosovo. These disconnected thematic clusters suggest that, although scholars have independently examined Serbia's economic diplomacy, Balkan geopolitics, and the Yugoslav historical record, the literature has largely failed to synthesise how historical memory itself functions as an active geopolitical instrument in contemporary foreign policy practice. The fragmentation of these scholarly conversations thus indicates a broader conceptual limitation in understanding how symbolic historical capital continues to shape diplomatic behaviour in the post-Cold War era (Westad 2005).

Responding to this fragmented body of literature, this article identifies a significant research gap: the absence of comparative discourse-based analyses examining how the collective memory of the NAM is strategically mobilised by various Serbian political administrations to manage the Kosovo issue (Distler 2022). Although previous studies acknowledge Serbia's historical connections with the Global South, they rarely investigate

how these accounts are discursively reproduced, adapted, and instrumentalised over time. More specifically, the existing literature has not systematically examined how successive Serbian administrations under Boris Tadić, Tomislav Nikolić, and Aleksandar Vučić have utilised the symbolic legacy of Yugoslavia's Non-Aligned diplomacy in bilateral engagements with Indonesia. This omission is analytically significant because each presidency operated under distinct domestic ideologies and geopolitical circumstances, ranging from liberal pro-Europeanism to nationalist conservatism and pragmatic geopolitical hedging.

Nevertheless, despite these differences, all three administrations consistently invoked the discourse of historical solidarity and NAM partnership in seeking Indonesia's continued non-recognition of Kosovo (Cerkini and Tenbrink 2026). By investigating this continuity, the present study argues that the legacy of the NAM functions not merely as passive diplomatic nostalgia but as an actively curated form of geopolitical capital that is repeatedly repackaged as contemporary diplomatic currency. In doing so, the article contributes to broader debates on memory politics, ontological security, and strategic narratives by demonstrating how states mobilise historical memory to secure both international legitimacy and the symbolic continuity of national identity in the twenty-first century.

Theoretical Framework

This article conceives collective memory not as passive recollection of historical facts, but as a politically curated narrative strategically mobilised to pursue contemporary foreign policy objectives. In contrast to positivist understandings of history as an objective archive of past events, sociological and constructivist approaches within International Relations emphasise that memory is inherently selective, interpretative, and socially reproduced through political discourse, state institutions, and diplomatic practices. What states remember, and equally what they choose to forget, is rarely accidental (Erl 2011). Rather, historical narratives are continuously reconstructed to provide coherence, legitimacy, and symbolic continuity for political action in the present (Nora 1989). Historical memory, therefore, functions less as a neutral reflection of the past than as a discursive resource capable of shaping state identity and diplomatic behaviour (Halbwachs 1992; Olick 1999).

Within this perspective, collective memory becomes particularly significant in foreign policy because it enables states to construct narratives of affinity, trust, and legitimacy in bilateral relationships. As Klymenko and Siddi (2020) argue, foreign policy discourse is frequently saturated with selective references to historical episodes that political actors strategically reinterpret to justify present-day geopolitical choices. States routinely elevate specific historical moments, diplomatic encounters, or symbolic figures into shared narratives that sustain international partnerships beyond immediate material interests (Wertsch 2002). Such processes are especially evident when contemporary strategic cooperation lacks strong economic or military foundations and therefore relies more on symbolic capital accumulated over time. In this regard, diplomatic memory serves not

merely commemorative purposes but also political ones: it generates affective continuity, reinforces perceptions of shared identity, and reduces diplomatic uncertainty by embedding present interactions within familiar historical frames (Ponamareva 2023; McGlynn and Đureinović 2023).

Applied to the Serbian case, this framework helps explain why the historical legacy of Yugoslavia's participation in the NAM continues to occupy a prominent place in Serbia's diplomatic engagement with Indonesia, despite radically transformed geopolitical conditions. Rather than serving as a static historical residue, the memory of the NAM era constitutes an actively maintained diplomatic repertoire through which Serbian political elites selectively invoke episodes such as the 1961 Belgrade Conference, the Bandung spirit, and the political friendship between Josip Broz Tito and Sukarno. These historical references are not mobilised simply to commemorate Yugoslavia's past international prestige; instead, they function as symbolic instruments through which Serbia constructs narratives of historical continuity, mutual solidarity, and diplomatic intimacy with Indonesia. In official bilateral discourse, references to "traditional friendship" and shared anti-colonial experiences are repeatedly articulated to cultivate political trust and reinforce Serbia's legitimacy as a longstanding partner rather than a merely opportunistic diplomatic actor (Bogetić 2021).

This strategic use of memory also reflects a broader sociological understanding that collective memory is inseparable from identity maintenance. As scholarship on ontological security suggests, states seek not only physical survival but also continuity in their sense of self through routinised narratives and stable relationships with significant others (Mitzen 2006). In periods of geopolitical uncertainty or identity disruption, historical memory may become especially valuable, offering symbolic reassurance and cognitive stability (Zarakol 2010). For post-Yugoslav Serbia, whose international identity has been repeatedly destabilised by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo secession crisis, the selective revival of NAM memory can therefore be understood as more than rhetorical nostalgia (Steele 2008). By continuously reaffirming diplomatic ties rooted in Yugoslavia's historical internationalism, Serbian leaders reproduce a sense of continuity between past and present state identity while simultaneously advancing concrete foreign policy interests (Langenbacher 2010). In this sense, memory becomes diplomatic currency: a symbolic asset repeatedly repackaged and deployed to sustain strategic relationships and legitimise Serbia's geopolitical claims in the contemporary international order (Kočan 2019).

Building on the understanding of collective memory as a strategic diplomatic resource, this article further argues that the persistence of Serbia's NAM discourse towards Indonesia can be better explained through the lens of discursive path dependence. The concept of discursive path dependence provides an important analytical framework for understanding the continuity of Serbia's foreign policy narrative regarding Kosovo after its 2008 declaration of independence. This framework combines the institutional logic of historical institutionalism with the constitutive role of discourse in shaping political legitimacy

and state behaviour. Historical institutionalism holds that once institutions, policies, or political narratives are established, they tend to create self-reinforcing mechanisms that constrain future political choices. In this context, Serbia's long-standing diplomatic narrative emphasising sovereignty, territorial integrity, and resistance to unilateral secession gradually evolved into an institutionalised discourse that became difficult for subsequent political leaders to abandon (Ker-Lindsay 2012). Rather than functioning merely as rhetoric, the discourse became embedded within state institutions, constitutional arrangements, diplomatic practices, and public political identity.

The persistence of this narrative can be explained by the logic of path dependence, whereby earlier political choices create a "lock-in effect" that limits future policy options. According to Greener (2005), path dependence arises when initial institutional formations restrict subsequent political behaviour through positive feedback mechanisms and historical continuity. After Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, Serbia intensified its use of sovereignty-based discourse in international forums, particularly by appealing to international law, territorial integrity, and support from states within the NAM (Borgen 2008). Over time, this strategy provided diplomatic utility and domestic political legitimacy, making the continuation of the discourse politically advantageous for Serbian leaders. As a result, even leaders with relatively pro-European orientations remained constrained by the established narrative framework, as abandoning it would risk undermining both domestic legitimacy and Serbia's diplomatic consistency in the international arena.

At the same time, discourse itself acts as a mechanism of institutional reproduction. Peters, Pierre and King (2005) argue that historical institutionalism often underestimates the role of political conflict and ideational contestation in maintaining institutional continuity. In the Serbian case, the discourse surrounding Kosovo was sustained not only through formal constitutional arrangements but also through ongoing political reproduction by elites, media, educational narratives, and nationalist symbolism.

The role of collective memory and historical trauma further reinforced this discursive continuity. Ramet and Günel (2025) explain that Serbian political elites have consistently instrumentalised the Kosovo myth as part of a broader strategy to shape national identity and collective political consciousness. Through state-controlled narratives, media discourse, and historical symbolism linked to the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, the issue of Kosovo became emotionally embedded within Serbian nationalism. This process transformed Kosovo from a territorial dispute into a symbolic representation of historical suffering, sovereignty, and national continuity. Consequently, Serbian political leaders inherited not only a diplomatic position but also a historically institutionalised emotional narrative that constrained policy flexibility. Even moderate political actors faced structural pressure to maintain the discourse because it had become intertwined with public expectations and political legitimacy (Ramet and Günel 2025).

Furthermore, the framework of discursive path dependence also explains why Serbia consistently sought support from NAM countries after 2008. The discourse of sovereignty

and non-intervention resonated strongly with the historical principles of NAM, particularly among post-colonial states concerned about separatism and external intervention. By framing Kosovo's independence as a violation of international law and territorial integrity, Serbia strategically aligned its diplomatic narrative with broader anti-secessionist sentiments within the Global South (Weller 2009). Over time, this diplomatic strategy became institutionalised in Serbian foreign policy, creating continuity across administrations regardless of ideological orientation. In this sense, Serbia's reliance on NAM was not simply a pragmatic foreign policy tool but part of a historically reproduced discursive structure that shaped how political actors interpreted international legitimacy and national interest.

However, path dependence does not imply absolute immobility. As Peters, Pierre, and King (2005) emphasise, political conflict and competing ideas persist beneath apparently stable institutional arrangements. In Serbia, alternative liberal narratives advocating pragmatic normalisation with Kosovo have emerged among intellectuals, civil society actors, and pro-European political groups. Ramet and Günel (2025) similarly demonstrate that Serbian public opinion is not entirely homogeneous and that segments of society challenge the dominant nationalist interpretation of Kosovo. Nevertheless, these alternative discourses remain structurally weaker than the dominant sovereignty-centred narrative, which has been institutionalised for decades. Therefore, while discursive contestation exists, the established narrative continues to shape the boundaries of politically acceptable foreign policy behaviour in Serbia.

Methodology

This article employs a systematic qualitative text analysis method using Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) software, specifically MAXQDA. The code tree was conceptualised deductively, derived directly from the synthesis of two principal theoretical frameworks (Saldaña 2021): theories of collective memory, particularly how it can be utilised as a diplomatic resource, and the theory of discursive path dependence. The theorisation of collective memory is used to operationalise how the past is selectively reconstructed by state actors, while discursive path dependence underpins the tracking of continuity, rhetorical institutionalisation, or shifts in linguistic patterns over time resulting from changes in the geopolitical landscape. The operational coding structure within MAXQDA is divided into three main categories, along with their specific usage criteria, as follows in Table 1:

CODE 1: NAM Collective Memory (Focuses on how historical narratives and shared memories of the NAM are reproduced in diplomatic discourse)		
Sub-code 1.1.	Historical Brotherhood	Represents discourses emphasizing emotional and historical ties between states. Texts containing terms such as “friendship,” “brotherhood,” “historical closeness,” “solidarity,” or references to long-standing emotional bonds between nations.
Sub-code 1.2.	Tito–Sukarno Legacy	Refers to the symbolic role of NAM founding leaders in legitimizing contemporary bilateral relations. Texts explicitly mention Marshal Josip Broz Tito and President Sukarno as founders of NAM or as symbols of historical diplomatic foundations.
Sub-code 1.3.	Foundational Principles	Captures references to the ideological foundations of NAM and Bandung principles. Texts referring to the 1961 Belgrade Conference, Bandung Principles, sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-intervention, peaceful coexistence, or anti-colonial cooperation.
Sub-code 1.4.	Anti-Hegemony	Identifies narratives resisting domination by major powers or external intervention. Texts framing resistance against imperialism, colonialism, Western domination, external intervention, or hegemonic global order.
CODE 2: Geopolitical Rationale (Focuses on contemporary foreign policy motivations and strategic interests behind diplomatic discourse)		
Sub-code 2.1.	Kosovo & Territorial Integrity	Represents narratives related to sovereignty and Serbia’s diplomatic position on Kosovo. Texts discussing UN Resolution 1244, international law concerning territorial borders, separatism, sovereignty, or expressions of gratitude toward Indonesia for not recognizing Kosovo.
Sub-code 2.2.	Multipolar Hedging	Refers to efforts to balance global power structures through alternative alliances. Texts emphasizing strategic cooperation outside Western/European dominance, Global South solidarity, strategic autonomy, or promotion of a multipolar world order.
Sub-code 2.3.	Economic & Defence Pragmatism	Captures transactional and strategic cooperation in economic and defence sectors. Texts shifting from historical rhetoric toward practical cooperation such as wheat exports, defence industries, military equipment, investment, trade, infrastructure, or economic partnerships.
CODE 3: Discursive Framing (Focuses on the rhetorical style and discursive strategies used by political elites)		
Sub-code 3.1.	Legalistic–Institutional	Represents formal and law-oriented diplomatic communication. The speaker uses rigid, procedural, and institutional language grounded in international law, legal legitimacy, UN resolutions, or constitutional arguments.
Sub-code 3.2.	Affective–Nostalgic	The speaker employs emotional language, historical romanticism, symbolic memories, collective trauma, or nostalgic references to past solidarity and historical struggles.
Sub-code 3.3.	Pragmatic–Transactional	Represents future-oriented and rational diplomatic communication. The speaker uses rational, efficiency-oriented, practical, or “win-win solution” language emphasizing future cooperation, economic benefits, strategic gains, or policy pragmatism (particularly dominant during the Vučić era).

Table 1: Operational Coding Structure (MAXQDA Codebook). *Source:* Developed by the authors, supported by the use of AI

The data corpus for this article was curated using purposive sampling. The selected data consists of documentary texts or direct quotations from official state representatives during each presidential term that specifically address Indonesia in a contextual manner. In the selection process, 11 documentary texts were identified, distributed across three presidential periods: 3 from the era of Boris Tadić, 2 from the era of Tomislav Nikolić, and 6 from the era of Aleksandar Vučić. This corpus was imported into MAXQDA for analysis using the Crosstabs feature to compare variations in discursive framing across regimes. The limited number of texts identified concerning Jakarta–Belgrade bilateral relations is due to the relatively distant nature of their ties and the limited diplomacy between them.

Results and Discussion

Corpus Mapping and Code Frequency Distribution

In this section, the authors analyse and discuss Serbia's memory diplomacy discourse through the lens of its bilateral relations with Indonesia, revealing how a historical narrative is strategically constructed to serve contemporary geopolitical interests. Using computer-assisted quantitative data extraction with MAXQDA software, the official discursive structure of the Serbian presidency can be systematically mapped across three regimes, each characterised by distinct domestic and geopolitical orientations: first, during the administration of President Tadić (2004–2012); second, in President Nikolić's era (2012–2017); and the ongoing era of President Vučić (2017–2025). The corpus analysed comprises official speeches, transcripts of joint press conferences, foreign ministry press releases, and bilateral treaty instruments, all produced in the aftermath of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 and continuing into the present.

In general, the main research finding indicates that collective memory in Belgrade's diplomacy towards Jakarta is not simply about romanticising historical nostalgia but is instead a strategic instrument dynamically managed to secure Jakarta's support on the issue of Kosovo's sovereignty. Furthermore, this article demonstrates a marked evolution in discursive patterns across the three presidential eras. These shifts range from a rigid legalistic approach to an emotional emphasis, and ultimately to transactional pragmatism. The article's critical findings also identify the practice of depersonalisation, specifically the erasure of founding figures such as Tito and Sukarno, who are deliberately replaced by faceless abstract concepts such as "Historical Brotherhood." This strategy serves both to avoid domestic political controversy in Serbia and to preserve historical appeal in Indonesia's eyes. To unpack how the evolution and manipulation of historical narratives operate, the argument must be examined through corpus mapping. Based on the frequency analysis of the Discursive Framing category, the macro-structure of Serbia's official discourse reveals an uneven yet strategic pattern of dominance. Legalistic-institutional framing accounts for the largest share, 50% (29 coded segments) of the entire textual corpus, as shown in Figure 2.

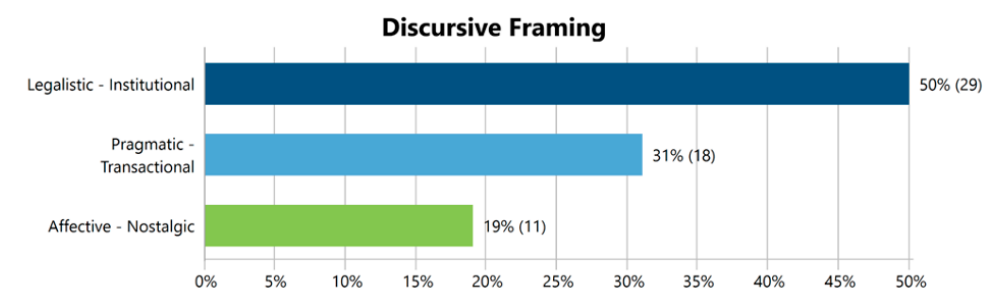


Figure 2: Distribution of Discursive Framing Codes across Three Administrations' Era (Processed by authors using MAXQDA)

Furthermore, this aggregate dominance confirms that arguments anchored in international jurisprudence, formal multilateral procedures, and supranational legal texts constitute the primary bedrock of Serbia's diplomatic articulation. Nevertheless, this discourse is by no means static. A Pragmatic-Transactional rhetoric emerges as the second most dominant framing, accounting for 31% (18 segments), followed by an Affective-Nostalgic framing that comprises 19% (equivalent to 11 segments). Such proportional shifts indicate tactical fluctuations in how the Serbian presidential elite articulates the collective memory of the NAM to align with their respective foreign policy agendas. When these frequencies are examined across chronological leadership timelines through document-relation visualization, the code distribution reveals a highly regime-specific concentration, as demonstrated in Figure 3.

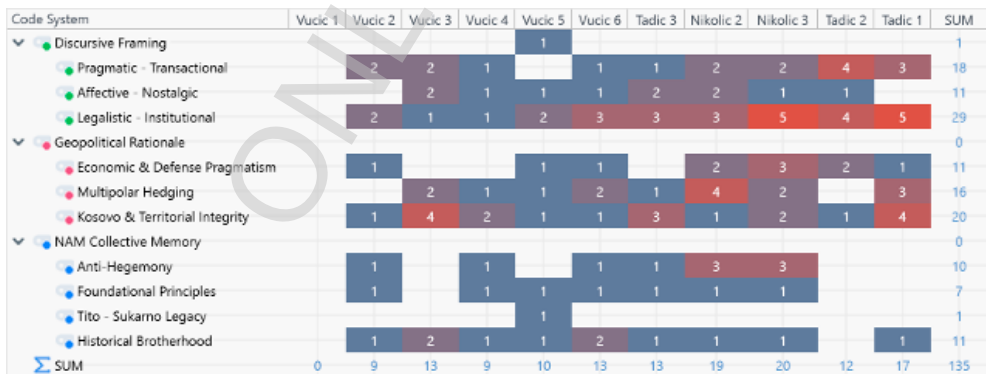


Figure 3: Code Matrix Browser of Discursive Framing across Presidencies (Processed by authors using MAXQDA)

The Code Matrix Browser matrix confirms that legal rigidity and institutional emphasis were heavily leveraged during the presidency of Boris Tadić. In contrast, the transition to

Tomislav Nikolić's administration was marked by the resurgence of an emotional, nostalgic narrative. With the onset of the Aleksandar Vučić era, the articulated narrative underwent a radical transformation towards a managerial and transactional discourse anchored strictly in Serbia's national interests. This shift was driven by a divergence of objectives regarding the NAM, fundamentally demonstrating that the movement has been commodified within Belgrade's foreign policy doctrine.

The Boris Tadić Era: The Hegemony of Legalistic-Institutional Framing

During Boris Tadić's presidency, particularly in the critical phase following Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008, Serbia adopted an exceedingly rigid, procedural diplomatic posture, relying almost exclusively on instruments of international law. Analysis of the lexical choices and syntactic structures produced by Tadić's diplomatic apparatus reflects a strategy of "discursive cleansing" that systematically removes sentimental elements. Bilateral relations with Indonesia are framed not through the emotional warmth of Third World historical solidarity but rather through the lens of formal conflict resolution and strict adherence to multilateral institutions, especially the United Nations.

The textual expression of this legalistic-institutional framing is consistently evident in the statements of Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić when articulating the significance of Indonesia's diplomatic position. During his official visit to Jakarta following the 2008 crisis, Jeremić stated, "The support of Indonesia is highly important also because we plan to launch an initiative for the UN General Assembly to request a legal opinion from the International Court of Justice on whether the independence of Kosovo was proclaimed in accordance with international law [...]" (MSP 2008).

Linguistically, the dense use of institutional terminology such as "UN General Assembly," "legal opinion," and "International Court of Justice" confirms that the legitimacy of state sovereignty is sought exclusively through the formal procedures of supranational global institutions (MSP 2008). The adverbial clause "on whether the independence of Kosovo was proclaimed in accordance with international law" establishes a rigid discursive boundary: Kosovo's independence is framed not as a legitimate political reality, but as an object of legal dispute whose validity must be determined solely within the jurisdiction of the highest international court (Milanovic 2015). This strategy effectively negates the dimensions of moral recognition and the right to self-determination for Kosovo's ethnic Albanian population, reducing their political status to a mere procedural violation of global constitutional law.

The discursive rigidity of the Tadić presidency was further reinforced by the use of high-obligation deontic modalities intended to preclude political compromise. This is evident when Jeremić defined the boundaries of bilateral conflict resolution by stating, "Indonesia does not support the unilaterally proclaimed independence of Kosovo and Metohija. We

agreed that the solution for the future status of the province must be found through negotiations and with respect for international law [...]” (MSP 2008). The use of the passive construction “unilaterally proclaimed independence” reflects an attempt to obscure the external actors (Western powers) that supported Kosovo.

At the same time, this phrasing discursively suggests that the act constitutes an illegal, unilateral violation of international norms. The choice of the noun “province” (sr. *pokrajina*) and the use of the full constitutional name “Kosovo and Metohija” serve as powerful ideological markers, subordinating the region administratively and historically under Belgrade’s full sovereignty while rejecting any form of de facto or de jure recognition of the Pristina entity. The modal phrase “must be found,” combined with “with respect for international law,” affirms that, for the President Tadić regime, the only legitimate discourse is legal compliance, thereby closing the door to political realities that evolve outside the corridors of formal law.

Moreover, this procedural compliance was internalised into the state’s international identity, constructing Serbia’s self-image as a law-abiding subject before the international community. This is reflected in President Tadić’s speech announcing the arrest of a former military figure, in which he said: “Today’s step is proof that Serbia is a state of law, and the further development of our legal system and order is the foundation for the implementation of reforms[...] the completion of cooperation with the Hague Tribunal for Serbia is not only a condition of Euro-integrations, but above all a moral and international-legal obligation” (Tanjug 2011a).

The juxtaposition of the concepts of the “state of law” (*Rechtsstaat*) and “international legal obligation” demonstrates that the enforcement of Serbia’s sovereignty and its external integration are situated within the logic of fulfilling rigid bureaucratic-legal obligations (Tanjug 2011b; Tanjug 2011a). The implications for the NAM in the current era are unmistakable, following the logic that invoking the NAM’s memory fully activates a romanticised memory.

The NAM is no longer addressed as a symbol of an emotional, anti-imperialist liberation movement, but is instead mechanically reduced to a mere tactical voting bloc. Furthermore, the Foreign Minister of this era calculates: “Jakarta could influence many states, primarily Muslim countries and members of the Non-Aligned Movement, at a moment when Serbia is striving to gain support for its stance in more than half of the UN member states” (MSP 2008). The use of the numerical lexicon “more than half” demonstrates that, under the framing of President Tadić’s administration, the collective memory of the NAM was treated transactionally within the UN system; the movement’s historical significance was dissolved into mathematical figures to advance Serbia’s legalistic-institutional claims to its territorial integrity.

The Tomislav Nikolić Era: A Tactical Shift Toward Affective-Nostalgic Framing

The leadership transition to President Tomislav Nikolić (2012–2017) brought a significant tactical shift in the style of Serbian diplomacy. Under this new regime, the bureaucratic-legal rigidity inherited from the Tadić era began to soften and, in some respects, be replaced by a discourse characterized as affective-nostalgic (19%). He hailed from the nationalist faction and recognized that cold international legal rhetoric was less effective in securing the long-term loyalty of Global South states. Consequently, his diplomatic apparatus deliberately revived an emotional language that romanticized memories, shared suffering, and historical grandeur to lock in Indonesia's diplomatic solidarity. This stylistic shift is palpably evident in the speech delivered by the Nikolić-era Foreign Minister, Ivan Mrkić, at the NAM Summit in Tehran. Mrkić articulated Serbia's position by drawing on an intensely dense affective lexicon: "The Republic of Serbia, as a European country, is deeply inclined towards the goal of becoming a member of the EU. Of course, it also deeply respects the Movement and its heritage, achievements, and essential values, principles, and goals. We feel great solidarity with the Movement [...]" (Tanjug 2012).

From a qualitative discourse perspective, the use of the intensive adverb "deeply" in "deeply respects" and the noun "heritage" marks a radical departure from the procedural orientation that characterised President Tadić's administration. The term "heritage" is used ideologically to assert historical continuity: Serbia positions itself as the sole legitimate heir to the geopolitical capital of Yugoslavia, one of the principal founding architects of the NAM. The most striking tactical shift lies in the use of pronouns. Whereas the Tadić era spoke from an institutional distance, the elites of the Nikolić era adopted an inclusive first-person plural pronoun: "We feel great solidarity" (Tanjug 2012). The use of "we" discursively dissolves the identity boundaries between modern Serbia, a geographically European state, and the collective entity of developing nations in the Global South, constructing a space of in-group solidarity based on a shared fate rooted in the historical past.

This effective framing strategy was intensively deployed in response to the dynamics surrounding the rejection of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. Rather than framing non-recognition merely as an obligation to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the act of non-recognition by developing states was transformed into an embodiment of the morality of sincere friendship: "[...]we will never, under any conditions, recognise the unilateral decision on the independence of Kosovo of the Albanian authorities[...] Expressing sincere gratitude to the great majority of NAM member states that have not recognised the separatists in Kosovo[...]" (Tanjug 2012).

The emotional lexicon "sincere gratitude" is used to engage the psychological dimension of Serbia's counterparts, transforming transactional diplomatic relations into a fraternal bond imbued with a sense of honour. The declarative phrase "we will never, under any conditions, recognise" expresses emotional steadfastness that rejects compromise, presenting the defence of sovereignty over Kosovo not as a rational foreign policy option

but as an inviolable, sacred national dignity. The apex of this affective rationality during the Nikolić era is reflected in the way the collective memory of the past was turned into a concrete soft-power instrument, replicating Yugoslavia's public diplomacy strategies during the Cold War.

This is evident in the emphasis on bilateral educational programmes articulated by Foreign Minister Mrkić. For instance, "we hope to increase the number of scholarships we have offered, as part of our 'World in Serbia' Scholarship Fund. Already, hundreds of young people from NAM countries have been enrolled at the University of Belgrade [...]" (Tanjug 2012). The mention that "hundreds of young people from NAM countries" studied at the University of Belgrade directly revives the collective memory of the Sukarno and Tito era, when Belgrade functioned as the intellectual and political epicentre for youth from the Third World. This historical romanticism is thus discursively reproduced not as a trade commodity, but as a long-term cultural and emotional network expected to continually reproduce diplomatic support for Serbia's territorial integrity across generational boundaries.

The Aleksandar Vučić Era: Radical Transformation Towards Transactional Pragmatism

The most radical and pragmatic discursive transformation occurred under the leadership of President Aleksandar Vučić, particularly during his second term. In this period, the discourse of memory diplomacy was commodified and pragmatically instrumentalised. The sentimental language inherited from the Nikolić era was not entirely abandoned; rather, it was appropriated and reduced to a tactical instrument, a means to an end, subordinated to pragmatic-transactional rationality. The qualitative discourse method reveals that President Vučić employs a managerial, technocratic, and market-oriented discursive style, focused on the future, bureaucratic efficiency, and the pursuit of win-win solutions. The memory of the NAM is no longer regarded as an a priori sacred moral legacy; instead, it is recontextualised as a commercial economic asset and a political lubricant for modern transactional diplomacy. This transactional character is evident in the actions of Ivica Dačić, the Foreign Minister during the Vučić era. Dačić articulated Serbia's foreign policy interests in Southeast Asia when signing cooperation instruments with ASEAN in Jakarta. He emphasised that "The accession to this treaty opens up opportunities to Serbia for closer dialogue, cooperation and involvement in various ASEAN networks and platforms, but also contributes to the promotion of substantial cooperation in the economic and socio-cultural areas between Serbia and that bloc" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia 2023).

The lexical choices used are dominated by corporate functional language such as "opportunities", "networks and platforms", and "substantial cooperation in the economic areas" (Beta 2023). Relations with developing countries are no longer defined solely by a shared history of suffering, but are now assessed according to their future material economic

utility. The logic of this pragmatic framing is also marked by its reactive and adaptive response to contemporary global geopolitical shocks, as officially stated by the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “increasing interest in collaborating with ASEAN countries in light of the new international situation [...]” (Beta 2023). The phrase “in light of the new international situation” reflects the tactical awareness among Vučić’s elite that restoring relations with Global South powers is necessary to secure national economic resilience amid the threat of sanctions and isolation resulting from the tectonic geopolitical shifts in contemporary Europe.

The discursive pragmatism of President Vučić’s era is further characterised by his rhetorical boldness in critically evaluating post-Yugoslav domestic history to justify his policy reorientation, as he stated: “Likewise, there are prospects that with some states we can correct the mistakes which emerged in one historical period when, after October 5 (the year 2000), we closed several embassies in Africa” (Tanjug 2024).

The phrase “correct the mistakes” paired with the noun “prospects” exemplifies a technocratic evaluative discursive style (Tanjug 2024). The closure of embassies in Africa after the fall of Slobodan Milošević, once celebrated as a pro-Western reformist measure, is now described as a “miscalculation” that eliminated economic market prospects and eroded Serbia’s base of foreign policy support in multilateral forums. However, as previously discussed, past sentiments are not discarded. When nostalgic discourse is invoked, discourse analysis shows it is used solely as a tactic to hijack discourse for transactional interests. The most striking example of this strategy appears in President Vučić’s speech at the opening of the High-Level Meeting commemorating the 60th anniversary of the NAM in Belgrade in 2021, where he stated, “Dear friends, welcome home! Belgrade was, is, and will be a proud host to every human being who carries within themselves the soul of peace[...] [Serbia is] ready to fight for its independence, autonomy, and sovereignty [...]” (Predsednik Republike Srbije 2021).

The emotional appeal “welcome home!” is deployed as a powerful affective anchor to position Belgrade as the historical spiritual centre of the international NAM. This phrase aims to elevate Serbia’s diplomatic status from that of a mere observer state to the host of this event in the contemporary post-Cold War era. However, this emotional clause is immediately appropriated for the material interests of sovereignty, as President Vučić promptly links it to the assertion that Serbia’s most pressing struggle today is the “preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity[...] that is, resolving the question of Kosovo and Metohija” (Predsednik Republike Srbije 2021). Through this technique of juxtaposition, he seeks to convert the warmth of historical nostalgia into diplomatic leverage to facilitate real transactions in the present, from smoothing negotiations over commodity food exports to securing commercial diplomacy deals.

Flexibility of “Historical Brotherhood” as a Universal Rhetorical Anchor

Despite pronounced fluctuations in discursive framing strategies across the three presidential eras – from legalism under Tadić, through the emotionalism of Nikolić, to the markedly transactional approach under Vučić – corpus analysis reveals one persistent element of discursive continuity. The collective imagination of “Historical Brotherhood” consistently occupies the highest position within the NAM Collective Memory category, accounting for 38% of coded segments, or 11 segments. In the discourse analysis approach, the high frequency of this code demonstrates that the concept of historical brotherhood functions as a “universal rhetorical anchor” characterised by an exceptionally high degree of semantic malleability.

The concept of historical brotherhood functions as a “floating signifier”, an abstract term whose meaning can be easily altered, repackaged, and refilled by different rulers without losing its original political persuasiveness for external audiences such as Indonesia. In the Tadić era, brotherhood was associated with formal international legal obligations to comply with the UN Charter (MSP 2008). In the President Nikolić era, it was conceptualised as an emotional, inner bond and shared suffering in rejecting Western unilateralism (Tanjug 2012). In the President Vučić era, by contrast, the concept has been radically commodified into a basis of mutual trust for facilitating economic contracts and future partnerships (Beta 2023). The 38% continuity of this code provides initial empirical evidence that the collective memory of the NAM is the most flexible and valuable instrument of diplomacy, as it carries enduring rhetorical value for Serbia’s foreign policy.

Weaponising “Foundational Principles” to Lock in Kosovo Non-Recognition Commitments

Cross-tabulation analysis using the MAXQDA Code Relations Browser reveals the strategic motives and genuine geopolitical rationale underlying Serbian elites’ orchestration of collective memory. The emic relationships among codes show that historical discourse is never produced solely out of nostalgia; rather, it is consistently used to support calculations for defending contemporary sovereignty and security. The Geopolitical Rationale category is dominated by the imperative of Kosovo and Territorial Integrity, which accounts for 43%, or 20 segments, of the entire discursive corpus, as shown in Figure 4.

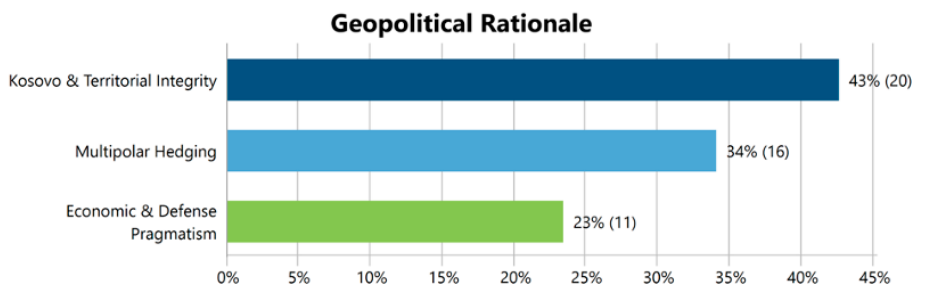


Figure 4: Distribution of Geopolitical Rationale Categories (Processed by authors using MAXQDA)

When these data are cross-tabulated with the memory category, a notably dense correlation appears at the intersection of the sub-code “Kosovo & Territorial Integrity” and the “Foundational Principles” code of the NAM, accounting for 24% of the total (see Figure 5). The density of these intersections provides clear empirical evidence of the weaponisation of the fundamental principles of the NAM. Serbia’s presidential elites deliberately manipulate the principles of sovereignty, respect for territorial boundaries, and non-intervention. Consequently, the points enshrined in the 1955 Bandung Dialogue and the founding charter of the 1961 Belgrade Conference became a formal rhetorical trap designed to lock Indonesia into a specific diplomatic position. In every bilateral speech text across the three presidential eras, the narrative concerning the sanctity of NAM principles is syntactically juxtaposed with expressions of gratitude for Jakarta’s consistent stance on the recognition of Pristina’s sovereignty (MSP 2008; Tanjug 2012; Predsednik Republike Srbije 2021).

This consistent coding strategy serves as a discursive lock-in technique. By repeatedly praising Indonesia’s adherence to international law and positioning Jakarta as the true moral guardian of the Bandung legacy, Serbia is psychologically and diplomatically dictating to Indonesia that any future shift in its political stance on Kosovo would be interpreted as a betrayal of the very foundational principles that Indonesia itself established together with Yugoslavia, as both were founding fathers of the movement. The reiteration of the NAM principles discourse thus shifts from a mere cultural-historical celebration to a highly effective non-material coercive instrument for securing Serbia’s territorial integrity on the world stage.

Anti-Hegemony and Multipolar Hedging as a Discourse of Resistance to Great Powers in the Globalisation Era

The second strategic intersection, which reveals the depth of Serbia’s geopolitical analysis, is evident in the exceptionally strong correlation between the discourse of Anti-Hegemony, accounting for 34% of collective memory, and the rationale of Multipolar Hedging, which constitutes 34% of geopolitical rationality. The high intensity of cross-tabulation

at this point unequivocally confirms the discursive articulation of resistance to homogeneous globalisation. The anti-hegemonic lexicon employed, such as the assertion that many states today “are threatened by the dominance of global powers” (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2006), is deliberately used to construct a shared contemporary fate between the two states.

Through a micro-level lexical analysis rooted in Discourse Analysis, the use of the abstract phrase “global powers” without explicitly naming hegemonic actors such as the United States or the European Union constitutes a strategy of obfuscation or passivisation. Serbian elites deliberately conceal the identity of these hegemonic actors in order to play it safe or to hedge. This rhetorical strategy enables Belgrade to garner sympathy from anti-Western NAM member states without explicitly jeopardising its prospects for institutional and economic integration with the West. The narrative was constructed by President Nikolić in 2006, before his nomination as President in 2012–2016. On 17 October 2006, he addressed the idea of NAM as a vital role in Serbia’s foreign policy at the Assembly House. Then, during President Vučić’s tenure, what was originally an anti-hegemonic stance is redirected and repurposed into a highly strategic “discursive shield” to justify hedging in Serbia’s foreign policy.

By deploying NAM memory, Serbia projects a self-image as an independent state defending the pluralism of the global order alongside the Global South, while simultaneously cultivating and legitimising an alternative strategic alliance through Belgrade’s four-pillar foreign policy (including China and Russia) without appearing to betray its international commitments (Bechev 2017). The historical romance of Cold War resistance is thus intelligently revitalised to serve Serbia’s contemporary hedging manoeuvres as it navigates great-power pressures from the West.

Findings on Discursive Path Dependence

Quantitative results and textual analysis using MAXQDA software provide robust empirical confirmation of discursive path dependence. The concept of discursive path dependence holds that an established, institutionally produced foreign policy narrative from the past creates a lock-in effect, constraining the discursive manoeuvrability of future political leaders. Since Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, the articulation of NAM memory regarding territorial integrity has crystallised into a binding discursive structure that limits Serbia’s foreign policy posture.

The high frequency and persistent recurrence of the “Kosovo & Territorial Integrity” code across all three presidencies demonstrate that Serbian leaders, regardless of their divergent domestic ideological orientations, are subject to structural constraints imposed by this established discursive path. President Boris Tadić’s administration was characterised by a technocratic and pro-Western orientation. During President Tomislav Nikolić’s right-wing nationalist administration and the pragmatically populist government of Aleksandar

Vučić, all remained bound to reproducing the discourse of NAM historical brotherhood. The ruling elites in Belgrade understand, with rational clarity, that abandoning the NAM narrative would amount to diplomatic suicide in Jakarta; such a move would collapse the entire edifice of historical legitimacy that has, until now, successfully dissuaded Indonesia from recognising Kosovo's sovereignty. This structure of path dependence ensures that the rhetorical legacies of the past are not only inherited but actively reproduced across successive regime changes.

However, critical analysis reveals that this path dependence does not merely condemn Serbia's foreign policy to rigidity and passivity. On the contrary, such discursive lock-in actively stimulates an ongoing process of modification – a repackaging of collective historical memory. This is empirically evidenced by the emergence of the Economic & Defence Pragmatism code, which accounts for 23% of the geopolitical matrix. Under pragmatic leadership, the traditional rhetoric of Historical Brotherhood (38%) is not abandoned but undergoes an intensive process of resignification and commodification. This article shows that collective memory is functionally repurposed from mere moral nostalgia, inert since the collapse of Yugoslavia, into a material political modality or diplomatic lubricant that facilitates the pursuit of contemporary economic and strategic interests for Belgrade. The narrative of past brotherhood is repackaged to enable the signing of strategic trade agreements, facilitate investment flows, negotiate food commodity quotas, and support strategic export-import transactions between Belgrade and Jakarta. This dynamic demonstrates that discursive path dependence can coexist with the transactional pragmatism driven by contemporary leadership.

Discursive Anomaly: The Depersonalization Strategy of the NAM Legacy

One striking finding from the qualitative data extraction is the extreme marginalisation of the Tito-Sukarno Legacy code. Across the entire corpus of official presidential texts spanning three periods, the code representing the names of these two major founders of the NAM appears only once, accounting for just 3% within the NAM Collective Memory category, as shown in Figure 5.

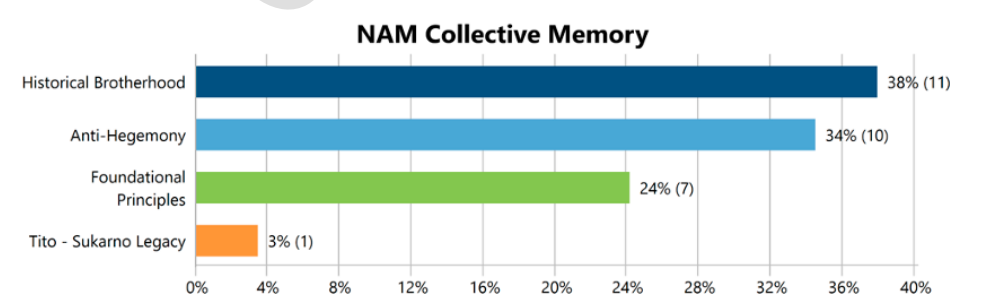


Figure 5: Distribution of NAM Collective Memory Categories (Processed by authors using MAX-QDA)

In conventional literature on collective memory in diplomacy, founding fathers are typically positioned as the epicentre of political nostalgia and serve as the primary personification for fostering warmth in bilateral relations between states. This case, therefore, stands out as a particularly striking finding, given the complete absence of references to both figures during the Tadić and Nikolić presidencies, and their only minimal appearance under President Vučić. Discourse Analysis reveals that this anomaly reflects a deliberate and rational “depersonalisation” strategy employed by Serbia’s foreign policy formulators. As Tito carries exceptionally complex historical baggage, ideological controversy, and problematic political residues within Serbia’s domestic discourse, personal glorification of Tito is systematically avoided. This aligns with the dynamics of memory politics in the Balkans, where post-Yugoslav Serbian nationalist narratives, particularly following the fall of Slobodan Milošević’s regime, have often demonised the Tito era as a period that systematically weakened Serbian national identity (Subotić 2019).

For Serbia’s domestic public, Tito’s communist legacy is often portrayed negatively as a past political structure that allegedly weakened Serbian nationalism through the internal administrative boundaries of Yugoslavia – boundaries that later became the legal basis for Kosovo’s secession. Consequently, the personal glorification of Tito on the international stage would amount to domestic political suicide, provoking strong resistance and undermining the electoral viability of the presidential regime at home. To navigate this dilemma, Serbia’s presidential elites employ a highly refined strategy of discursive substitution. They deliberately eliminate the problematic personification of individual historical figures and instead focus on faceless abstract concepts that are far less likely to provoke domestic controversy: namely, Historical Brotherhood (38%) and Anti-Hegemony (34%).

This institutional abstraction is considerably more neutral regarding Serbia’s internal political debates, while retaining its historical appeal and legitimacy in Indonesia’s view. The faceless concept of historical brotherhood has an exceptionally high degree of semantic malleability; it can be readily shaped and refashioned to serve contemporary geopolitical interests. As such, it serves as a far safer, more productive, and more efficient discursive instrument for facilitating Serbia’s multipolar hedging manoeuvres and extracting the benefits of modern transactional diplomacy on the current international stage.

Beyond Nostalgia: Discursive Path Dependence and the Rationality of Depersonification

The evolution of Serbian diplomatic discourse towards Indonesia after 2008 cannot be understood simply as a reflection of nostalgia. It is an empirical manifestation of discursive path dependence. Within the framework of historical institutionalism, the trajectory of state policy or discourse is often determined by a critical juncture that fundamentally transforms the political constellation (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2004). Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 was a critical juncture in the architecture of Serbian foreign policy. It posed an existential threat to Belgrade’s territorial integrity while si-

multaneously triggering a wave of recognition from Western states. In response, Serbian elites mobilised broad support from Global South countries, including Indonesia, which played a pivotal role as a key diplomatic anchor.

During Tadić's administration, the Serbian leadership made a rational decision to reactivate the narrative of the NAM rather than construct an entirely new diplomatic framework. This initial choice to deploy the NAM's historical discourse triggered a lock-in effect driven by increasing returns (Pierson 2000). Furthermore, had Belgrade sought to construct a completely new diplomatic narrative on the international stage during that period, the political costs and institutional resources required would have been prohibitively high, with uncertain prospects for success. By contrast, drawing on Yugoslavia's discursive legacy yielded measurable increasing returns and, most notably, Indonesia's consistent support in rejecting Kosovo recognition resolutions across multilateral forums.

Consequently, this discursive trajectory became locked into Serbia's rhetorical strategy across successive regime transitions. Although President Nikolić emerged from an ideological spectrum markedly different from that of President Tadić, he had no rational incentive to depart from the established NAM discursive path. On the contrary, Nikolić deepened this trajectory through an affective-nostalgic approach (Schmidt 2008). This dependence demonstrates that discursive institutions possess a resilience that transcends the individual ideological preferences of policymakers.

Nevertheless, discursive path dependence does not imply rigid stagnation. With the advent of Vučić's presidency, the NAM discursive legacy underwent what discursive institutionalism terms discursive conversion. Unlike his predecessors, who used NAM discourse solely as an instrument of legal protection or emotional solidarity, President Vučić repurposed it to legitimise contemporary transactional interests. Historical narratives were recontextualised as a discursive lubricant for defence-industry negotiations, wheat export penetration, and increasingly assertive multipolar hedging manoeuvres. In this way, the architecture of NAM discourse was preserved, yet its function was pragmatically reconfigured to serve modern economic and military rationalities without dismantling the institutionalised historical path (Schmidt 2008).

Despite this established continuity, the operationalisation of NAM discourse at the domestic level gives rise to an empirical anomaly: the systematic erasure of the founding figures from official texts. Here, the theoretical lens of collective memory as a diplomatic resource becomes a crucial tool for unpacking the rationality underpinning Serbia's presidential texts. As argued by Halbwachs (1992) and further developed by Olick (1999), collective memory is not merely a repository of objective historical facts, but a social construction selected and reproduced to serve the rationality of present-day power. In the context of foreign policy governance, memory is harnessed as a resource, the capitalisation of which is strictly subject to political cost-benefit analysis (Assmann 2008).

In the strategic calculations of Serbia's elites, the historical memory of the Non-Aligned Movement holds significant value in the external diplomatic arena, as it has proven effective in securing Indonesia's commitments. However, a crucial element of that memory, particularly the central figure of Tito, is a discursively toxic commodity in the domestic sphere. Following the collapse of Yugoslavia, Serbia's domestic political and cultural landscape has been dominated by ethnonationalist narratives that radically revise history and demonise the communist regime. Marshal Tito was widely blamed by nationalist circles for his decentralisation policies under the 1974 Constitution, which were considered to have laid the legal groundwork for Kosovo's secessionist demands (Subotić 2019).

Consequently, personally glorifying Tito on the international stage would trigger what is termed an ontological security crisis at home (Mitzen 2006; Ejdus 2020). For the incumbent regime, resurrecting Titoist nomenclature or radical communist iconography constitutes an act of "political suicide", provoking sharp resistance from right-wing and conservative constituencies. The regime is therefore compelled to navigate two audiences with equivalent yet opposed mnemonic demands: an international audience (Indonesia) that romanticises the Tito-Sukarno legacy, and a domestic audience (Serbia) that defines Tito as the architect of their sovereign territory's mutilation.

To neutralise this extreme cost-benefit dilemma, Serbia's presidential elites have enacted a strategy of strategic decoupling. Analysis of the text corpus reveals the complete absence of any mention of the nomenclature "Tito" or "Sukarno", which are precisely replaced by faceless concepts: Historical Brotherhood and Anti-Hegemony. This strategy is designed to excise personal actor entities from the fabric of historical narrative, thereby extracting and retaining only their abstract values. Through this discursive sterilisation, the Serbian regime protects itself from the fury of domestic ethnonationalist sentiment, while remaining capable of supplying the illusion of historical continuity of brotherhood that remains diplomatically marketable to Indonesia.

On this foundation of faceless abstract concepts, the semantic malleability of memory diplomacy operates most effectively. The phrases Historical Brotherhood and Anti-Hegemony refer to no specific actor's legacy, but instead float freely as safe, universal signifiers of anti-Western identity. This enables successive administrations to continue extracting diplomatic dividends from the past without incurring liability for the actions of previous regimes. Serbia's memory diplomacy thus does not operate through holistic historical commemoration, but rather through the deliberate instrumentalisation of selective amnesia and conscious discursive disinfection (Connerton 2008).

This manipulative discursive formation offers a fundamentally significant theoretical contribution to contemporary International Relations discourse. Conventionally, the academic literature often positions memory diplomacy as a process of heroic glorification and the commemoration of proud national figures. However, the findings from Serbia-Indonesia diplomatic relations support a sharply anomalous thesis: under conditions of domestic risk entrapment, the success of memory diplomacy does not rest on the inheri-

tance of heroism from past historical figures but rather depends precisely on the rationality of de-personification. The collective management of state memory becomes an effective geopolitical instrument precisely when its original actors are deliberately submerged, leaving behind an empty mnemonic framework that can be re-engineered to secure state territorial defence in the contemporary era.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that Serbia's repeated references to the NAM in its relations with Indonesia are not motivated by nostalgia or sentiment. Across three presidencies with markedly different political orientations, Serbian leaders consistently employed the shared memory of the NAM as a deliberate foreign policy instrument, adapting it over time to serve a single core objective: preventing Indonesia from recognising Kosovo as an independent state. Each president conveyed this aim in his own manner – President Tadić relied on legal arguments, Nikolić emphasised emotional ties and shared history, and President Vučić focused on practical economic cooperation – yet all three consistently returned to the same core language of historical friendship.

The near-total disappearance of Tito and Sukarno as named figures from the observed texts is equally significant. Instead of celebrating these founding personalities, Serbian leaders quietly replaced them with safer, more ambiguous concepts such as brotherhood and anti-imperialism – a calculated strategy that allowed them to extract diplomatic value from the shared past without provoking domestic backlash. These patterns confirm that Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence set Serbia on a fixed discursive trajectory, one that every subsequent government inherited and maintained, regardless of its own political convictions.

Beyond Serbia and Indonesia, this article offers two broader conclusions. For scholars, it demonstrates that the concept of discursive path dependence – the idea that past narratives constrain future leaders to reproduce them – is a powerful tool for understanding how historical memory shapes foreign policy over time. For practitioners and observers of diplomacy, it shows that memory diplomacy is most effective not by glorifying the past, but by selectively forgetting the aspects that cause domestic difficulties. Future research could apply this framework to other post-socialist states that inherited significant Cold War diplomatic legacies and would also benefit from examining how Indonesia interprets and responds to Serbia's historical overtures.

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