NON-ALIGNMENT MOVEMENT: RELEVANCE IN PRESENT SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT

A debilitating global economic downturn, ongoing regional conflicts, and growing levels of inequality and hunger have seriously undermined any notion of the G8 as ‘guardians’ of international economic policy. As the elite group’s rhetorical commitments to development and climate change appear increasingly irrelevant, renewed hope for political decision-making surrounds the more representative groupings of nations working through the United Nations. One such body, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), met in July 2009 to support a range of progressive reforms that have the potential to re-establish a much-needed economic, social and political balance in international affairs. The present paper tries to reveal the significance of NAM in contemporary scenario.

INTRODUCTION

Humanity survived amidst the conflicts in the Stone Age, the Iron Age, in Gun Powder Age and also in the Age of Warships, and Bombers Plane, but there could be no hope of survival in the age of nuclear bombs. Therefore, war could no longer be treated as politics by other means as war in the 21st century would not leave behind any survivors, victors or vanquished. So, NAM is then a pioneer nuclear destruction. Although a threat of a war “a nuclear war has certainly disappeared with the end of the cold war, yet the number of nuclear powers have increased. The world is still divided between the nuclear have and the have-nots. But NAM from the very beginning and even in more recently meets at Havana in 2006 and Sharm-el-Sheikh Egypt 2009 demanded for the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons within a time bound framework as well as asserted for the right over peaceful use of nuclear power. The movement also stood
opposed to the treaties on WMD (Weapon of Mass Destructions) which were not universal in nature.

In the contemporary international circumstances non-alignment or to put it more precisely its role and usefulness in general has become a highly controversial issue, certainly more so than earlier. Thus, the movement is passing through a critical period in its life. It finds itself today at the crossroad and seems to be finding it difficult to comprehend the path it has to rake. It is trying to find its identity, reorient its perception and endeavor to determine the role it has to play in the changed context of international relations. This has resulted in a heated debate about the validity and contemporary relevance of NAM and non-alignment as foreign policy behavior in this post cold war “uni-polar world”. Expressions of doubt about its relevance and efficacy have assumed extra vigor after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Block. Its traditional critics gleefully pronounced that non-alignment buried under the debris of Berlin wall and the exercises of the NAM are no more than flogging on the dead horse. According to the critics, NAM is no longer relevant because of the changed international environment. It is engaged that the policy of Non-alignment had some utility in the period of cold war bipolarity, because it was child of cold war in the reaction of certain countries to the cold war. The two main contenders for political ascendancy had almost reached the point of extermination. It was the desire to preserved independence as distinct from merely formal sovereignty, which led some nation to resist absorption into one or the other power blocks. Presently the international system is no longer bipolar and the cold war is over, so what is its relevance today is a great question. In spite all these above statement regarding its irrelevant, the relevance of NAM in international affairs is unquestionable. As a matter of fact, the policy of Non-Alignment was not wholly related to a bipolar world and the cold war between the two super powers and the block they lead. It just happened that the Non-Alignment flowered in the immediate post-world war. Therefore, whatever the world is bi-polar or multi-polar or uni-polar, non-alignment as a foreign policy choice option of the small Third World countries will remain valid. In other words the policy will last as long as the sovereign nation system last.

The term "Non-Alignment" was coined by V K Menon in his speech at UN in 1953 which was later used by Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru during his speech in 1954 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In this speech, Nehru described the five pillars to be used as a guide for Sino-Indian relations, which were first put forth by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. Called Panchsheel (five restraints), these principles would later serve as the basis of the Non-Aligned Movement. The five principles were:

- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty
- Mutual non-aggression
- Mutual non-interference in domestic affairs
- Equality and mutual benefit
- Peaceful co-existence
Jawaharlal Nehru's concept of non-alignment brought India considerable international prestige among newly independent states that shared India's concerns about the military confrontation between the superpowers and the influence of the former colonial powers. New Delhi used nonalignment to establish a significant role for itself as a leader of the newly independent world in such multilateral organizations as the United Nations (UN) and the Nonaligned Movement. The signing of the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation between India and the Soviet Union in 1971 and India's involvement in the internal affairs of its smaller neighbors in the 1970s and 1980s tarnished New Delhi's image as a nonaligned nation and led some observers to note that in practice, nonalignment applied only to India's relations with countries outside South Asia.

The organization was founded in Belgrade in 1961, and was largely conceived by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru; Indonesia's first president, Sukarno; Egypt's second president, Gamal Abdel Nasser; Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah; and Yugoslavia's president, Josip Broz Tito. All five leaders were prominent advocates of a middle course for states in the Developing World between the Western and Eastern blocs in the Cold War. The phrase itself was first used to represent the doctrine by Indian diplomat and statesman Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon in 1953, at the United Nations.

Fidel Castro, during the Havana Declaration of 1979, said the purpose of the organization is to ensure "the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of non-aligned countries" in their "struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics". The countries of the Non-Aligned Movement represent nearly two-thirds of the United Nations' members and contain 55% of the world population. Membership is particularly concentrated in countries considered to be developing or part of the Third World.

The relevance of NAM continues as it looks after the interest of all Third World countries for which the movement was created. The beginning of the Non-Alignment can be traced to Afro-Asian resurgence a reaction against European colonial systems and prior to that in the struggle of underdeveloped countries against the hegemony of great European powers since the birth of nation state system. These oppressed, suppressed, and dominated states struggled hard for freedom from the colonialism, imperialism and great power domination to choose their own path in the internal development and external policies. That is why they accorded a high place to international peace, security and cooperation. It was a coincident that just when these countries begin to gain independence, they found themselves in bipolar worlds. Seeking membership of either block meant compromised on newly owned freedom by sovereign states, as well as an increased in international tensions, which is turned threatened the prospects of development-socio-economic and political.

The concept ‘Third World’ is important to form an understanding of what is meant by the ‘spirit of Bandung’ or Non-Alignment, which formed in the Belgrade Conference in 1961 where NAM was formed. The concept ‘Third World’ has both a materialistic and a cultural meaning. In materialistic terms, Marc argues that “if the affluent industrial countries of the modern world are
grouped into those of the ‘West’ and those of the ‘East’, … then the poor countries constitute a ‘Third World’ whose small command over resources distinguishes them from both’.

Although the term Third World has lost currency since the 1970s when other terms, such as ‘underdeveloped countries’, ‘developing countries’, and ‘South’ or ‘Global South’, became more widely used, revisiting the term conveys a sense of the conceptual foundations on which non-alignment rests. Nehru, then Prime Minister of India and a respected statesman, had also attended the Congress of Oppressed Nations in Brussels in 1927. As his brainchild, in essence non-alignment means the pursuit of equality in world affairs through pooling the diplomatic resources of Third World states in international forums. Equality should here be understood in political-economic terms. Equality for colonized or oppressed people and states translated into the right to self-determination and this dominated the agenda in the first decade of NAM’s existence. NAM was, for example, a front of political solidarity by supporting liberation struggles and making abstention from military pacts or alliances a criterion of membership. Inherent in a foreign policy orientation of non-alignment was a post-colonial claim to the rights of statehood awarded to independent states in the Westphalia system, and the mutual respect embodied by multilateralism as proclaimed in the UN Charter.

In the UN General Assembly NAM played a significant role in transferring the permanent seat in the UNSC previously filled by the Republic of China (Taiwan) to mainland China, as well as to garner support for other national independence struggles. Wiese argues that although it was not NAM’s original intention to become caught up in the Cold War, the movement soon realized that it could bring its political leverage to bear in international forums to gain more influence for developing countries.

Non-Aligned emphasized on independent, judgment, independent decision making and independent actions and provided them with a suitable alternative foreign postulates. Thus, cold war as dominant theme of post-second world war international relations certainly influenced and shaped the emergence of Non-Alignment, but it was by no means the cause of that emergence. Besides the opposition of cold war and bloc politics which NAM propagated was not its main goal but rather a means to promote the positive cause of the protection and preservation of newly attained independence of the member’s states. For the socially backward, economically weak and politically fragile nonaligned countries of Third World countries, international peace could not be achieved under threatening shadows of the cold war and therefore had to be avoided.

TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

Whilst obviously progressive, the movement’s positions on peace and security, social and economic development, human rights and international law are far from radical. These proposals are, however, rooted in a historically pro-poor framework that draws heavily upon the Charter of the United Nations and numerous political processes, declarations, and resolutions aimed at rendering global governance more representative. In many ways, the latest summit reflects an ongoing cycle of high-level advocacy by the Global South in an attempt to create a more equitable economy within the context of a nuclear weapon free, peaceful world.
Even with such a profoundly reasonable set of demands, the voice of the NAM – like many of the resolutions it draws upon, has been drowned out by the noisy rhetoric of very small groupings of countries that still hold the political and economic reigns in international relations. The unwillingness to relinquish this concentration of power in global governance goes against the principle of democracy that this elite group otherwise advocate.

Moreover, any criticisms of the movement’s modern irrelevance in a uni-polar, decolonized world are largely unwarranted given its growing popularity in the Global South and among civil society organizations. Not only does the movement have an ever more pressing mandate, it purveys the overarching consensus of the developing world whilst promoting the founding principles of the United Nations. In this period of escalating crises, it is time that the self-appointed bastions of the global economy paid heed to the urgent calls of the majority world for inclusive representation, peaceful conflict resolution and greater economic cooperation.

Thus, the major thrust of NAM is the creation of a new world based on rational, democratic, equitable and non-exploitative inter-states relation. Its commitment has been not just against bloc divisions of cold war but for one world for universal peace and development. The end of the cold war has ended a period of strategic confrontations but an era of stable global peace is yet to be created. In fact the cold war is dead but not the regional conflicts and crisis. The East-West conflict has dissolved but intense economic and technological competition is emerging among several strong nations. The Non-Aligned countries have to learn to maneuver among them and to successfully face the menace of new colonialism that is sought to be imposed through various WTO round. Thus, the NAM continued to be relevance so long as there is exploitation, war, hunger, poverty and disease on the earth.

A comprehensive assessment of the theory and practice of NAM through the last three decades reveals that it remains relevant to the changing world scenario irrespective of the fact that whether there is cold war or détente, whether the world is uni-polar, bipolar, or multi-polar. The uniqueness of NAM lies in the fact that its goals do not merely serve the national interest of member state but it stand to promote the cause humanity. They are universalistic in nature. It would not be an exaggeration to say that recent positive developments on international scene reflect the spirit of NAM.

Non-alignment is a political concept that strives for the remodeling of the international society, as a whole, and not merely any single aspects of it though inevitably the nonaligned nation had stressed particular aspects at a particular period of time.

While the challenge of international peace continue to be the predominant concern, the immediate task facing the NAM with the creation of a new, just and equitable international economic and social order. The struggle of NAM is now entering a new phase when most developed nation of the world appeared to be accepting in principle the need for a new international order. The fundamental concern of NAM has always been with global question of decolonization and consolidation of freedom, disarmament and development of economies through mutual cooperation as well as through a more equitable and just new international economic order. All these are interrelated and to make the package of peace and prosperity for humanity.
Former Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao highlighted the role of NAM in June 1992 in Tokyo “the pursuit of a Non-Alignment policy is even more relevant to ever before NAM basically consists of the espousal of the right of nations to independence and development, regardless of the bloc phenomena. Whether there is one bloc or more at a given movement the urge of a nonaligned country would continue to maintain its independence, to take decisions according to its light not tagging itself in advance to other”. Again the Cartagena submit 1995 reaffirmed the “validity of the NAM and its fundamental principle” and the various norms of international life “peace, independence, sovereign equality, non-intervention in internal affairs”. It declared against poverty, hunger, illigacy, racial discrimination and xenophobia, terrorism, nuclear weapon, environmental degradation, foreign occupation. Further in the Foreign Minister summit of April 1997 in New Delhi IK Gujral said,” NAM affords its members a forum where they can discuss their common problems, evolve solutions and work out positions in trying to tackle the international problems of peace, security, development, environmental safety, human rights etc. Delhi Conference announced: the UN and the Security Council should become more representative of its increased memberships, non-discriminatory, time bound nuclear and general disarmament should be the objective towards which the movement should endeavors.

The Foreign Minister of Colombia Dr Maria Emma Mejiva Velez perhaps best reflected the relevance of NAM: today Non-Alignment meant more than “not being aligned to the great power bloc”. It meant that nations were not to be aligned with military alliances and seeks to get involved in peace making like the Middle East. NAM in today’s world has to address issues of the future rather than the past because anti-colonialism has been transformed into democratization of more nations and development has become identified with environmental protection.

Perhaps the most important role for NAM today lies in framing a concrete economic agenda for a just and fair international economic order. The globalization and liberalization trends worldwide have generated complex economic problems. The rich-poor divide has widened. The WTO rules and procedures have failed to provide adequate economic gains to the Third World. WTO summits have failed to reach a consensus on many issues. Its role in WTO negotiations to advance and protect the trading rights and opportunities of developing countries and in muscling up their negotiating position and skills would be the chief concerns. It should strive to reform and reorient the globalization process through a strong developmental agenda. NAM has an effective role to play in this regard provided member countries try to see the benefits from a unified angle without any partisan considerations.

Therefore, South-South cooperation should become a major economic plank of the movement. Its role in the present century would be strengthened by more South-South cooperation, which would mean, by and large, collaboration between and among the NAM countries and defending their interests from fast expanding economic and technological power of the North. NAM should develop a progressive agenda on the fundamental values of democracy, human rights and multiculturalism. The preservation and consolidation of democracy throughout its membership is a major challenge. NAM’s spectrum could be further enlarged with the increasing concern worldwide over environmental issues over green house gas emissions, health concerns especially AIDS, drug trafficking, rising instances of poverty, food crisis and unemployment mostly within
the NAM members and LDC countries, the rising digital divide between the rich and poor and fight against all shades of extremism, xenophobia, ethnic nationalism and regional wars.

As there is the possibility of reappearance of war monger in the scene of world affairs peacemaking become a continuous process must be pursued every time by the NAM. In fact until the world is not free from war and world peace is not guaranteed, the real development of the Third World counties will remain only a distant dream. Further as colonialism has been replaced by the phenomenon or neo-colonialism in the form of economic exploitation by the MNC because of the process of LPG (liberalization, privatization, and globalization) the role of the NAM must play the positive role in making the globalization inclusive and must strive to achieve a fair, just international economic order. Therefore, Non-Alignment has not lost any of its relevance rather it has stood the test of time. It has served the useful purpose of protecting and preserving the interest of the Third World countries well in the past, so it is also expected to serve their interest well in the future to come. NAM can play the most important role in protecting the economic interest of the Third World countries as well as promoting south-south cooperation. Thus the philosophy of NAM is as relevant as ever for the Third World. The Non-Aligned Movement, faced with the goals yet to be reached and the many new challenges that are arising, is called upon to maintain a prominent and leading role in the current International relations in defense of the interests and priorities of its member states and for achievement of peace and security for mankind.

“The Non-Aligned Movement played a significant role in ending apartheid and colonialism. Today, its relevance continues in promoting South-South cooperation and democratization of the international system,” (Indian express June 29, 2007).

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