



NON-ALIGNMENT MOVEMENT IN A MULTI-POLAR WORLD: PROSPECT FOR MULTILATERALISM

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Abstract:

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was officially founded in 1961 at the Belgrade Conference in Yugoslavia, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru of India , Joseph Broz Tito of Yugoslavia , Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt , Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Sukarno of Indonesia. It emerged as a collective response by newly independent states to the prevailing Cold War order, which was characterised by rigid military and ideological blocs led by the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union. Rather than aligning with either bloc, NAM sought to preserve strategic autonomy, promote peaceful coexistence, and safeguard the political sovereignty of post-colonial states. Throughout the course of the Cold War , the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) played a proactive and significant role in articulating the collective interests of newly independent states in particular and establishing world peace in general . However, in the post–Cold War period, its relevance and continued existence have been increasingly questioned in academic and policy circles. This paper examines the motivations behind the formation of the NAM, assesses its contemporary relevance, and analyses the extent to which it can contribute meaningfully to the promotion of multilateralism in the present international system.

Key Words: *Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Belgrade Conference in Yugoslavia,*

Introduction: Although the background for the formation of NAM was built much earlier during the Afro–Asian Conference, held in New Delhi in 1957, however, the movement took a concrete shape at the Bandung Conference, Indonesia, in 1955, where as many as 29 countries expressed their willingness to remain aloof from Cold War politics while adopting a decision of non-alignment and cooperation. The spirit and gesture of these nations culminated in the holding of the first conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1961, in which 25 countries attended and outlined five important criteria to be a NAM member:

1. A country which follows and believes in following an independent foreign policy, particularly in the context of Cold War politics.
2. A country which is opposed to colonialism and imperialism in all forms and manifestations.
3. It should not have concluded any military relations with any of the two superpowers.
4. It should not have concluded any bilateral pact with any of the superpowers.



5. It should not have allowed a military base on its territory to any superpower.

Rationale behind the Formation of NAM

- a) Self-preservation and political sovereignty.
- b) Independence of foreign policy by maintaining equi-distance from both the superpowers and abstaining from joining any military bloc.
- c) Opposition to colonialism and racism in all forms and manifestations.
- d) Peaceful co-existence by adhering to the principles of Panchsheel.
- e) Economic development.
- f) World peace and disarmament.

The movement drew stiff opposition from both superpowers—the USA and the USSR. John Foster Dulles of the United States described it as “immoral.” On the other hand, Stalin remarked that “those who are not with us are against us.” Despite such criticism, NAM countries continued to pursue the policy by taking independent positions on various international issues. Over time, several summits were held periodically, and by 2006 the movement had expanded to 120 members, making it the largest international grouping outside the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Relevance of NAM in the Contemporary Multi-polar System

NAM played a credible role in preserving international peace and order during the Cold War, when the world was divided into dangerous camps on an ideological basis. However, NAM’s existence and credibility came under scrutiny after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, as the NAM’s primary objective of ending the Cold War was served.

On the other hand, its inability to deal with the Gulf Crisis, even when Iraq and Kuwait were NAM members, became another reason for demanding its dissolution. Scholars like C. Raja Mohan went on to state that “NAM is in a state of coma.” Instead of dissolving it, NAM countries preferred to give new agendas to the movement in the context of changing international scenarios. In fact, civil society suggested the concept of NAM 2.0 to revitalize it, and in this line of revitalization, NAM countries came out with a new theme: “The agenda is to check unilateralism and go for the democratization of the world order” at the Havana Summit, 2006.

Thus, the Non-Aligned Movement has a multifaceted role to perform in view of the following contexts:

The New Cold War between the US and China

China has repositioned itself as the challenger to the present world order. The new Cold War is more economic and military in nature than ideological and philosophical. At the same time, the alignment of China and Russia is clearly visible. In this context, NAM, being the sole largest economic and social conglomeration, can play a productive role.



NAM and Multilateralism

NAM today is the largest group outside the UNGA. With its membership of 120 countries, it can vociferously put forward the collective voice of the Third World or developing countries in global economic governance. It can raise issues of unfair trade practices, market access, and non-discriminatory and favourable terms of trade in the WTO, IMF, and the World Bank.

NAM and Democratization of the UN

NAM countries, since the beginning, have sought the democratization of the UN by facilitating equitable representation in the body. The appeal has always come from Third World countries to make the UN more representative by accommodating members from the developing world in the UNSC, emphasizing that the current system is undemocratic and unrepresentative.

NAM and South-South Cooperation

South-South cooperation, or cooperation among developing countries, has been a cardinal virtue of NAM since its inception. It can be facilitated by sharing technical expertise, capacity building, skills, and sustainable development practices. It can highlight issues of economic inequality, foreign debt, poverty, and technological access. In addition to that, NAM represents two-thirds of the world's population, and it can take up rising global issues such as disease, poverty, health, unemployment, terrorism, radicalization, drug abuse, exploitation of women, and environmental issues.

Conclusion

Though NAM at one point in time was labeled as a relic of the Cold War, nevertheless, it has stood the test of time and circumstances. Even the principles that it talked about during the 1955 Bandung Conference, such as peaceful co-existence, respect for a rules-based international system, and independence of foreign policy, hold profound importance and are cherished.

On the whole, NAM has been a dynamic force, as it has come out with relevant themes periodically relating to present challenges. For instance, in its latest summit held at Kampala, Uganda, it declared the theme "Deepening Cooperation for Shared Global Affluence," emphasizing multilateralism, South-South cooperation, and economic development. Although it has challenges and weaknesses, its existence and role are crucial in the present evolving multi-polar system.

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