

NAM News 1-8-03 Non-Aligned Movement: relevance of the third force

Some of the most prominent post-independence third world leaders conceived Non-Aligned Movement as a third force in world affairs between the two competing global military alliances. The founders of the movement wanted to chart an independent course in foreign affairs by shunning policy of alliances that both the Western nations and the Soviet bloc were pressing for. The Western powers in particular wanted the newly independent country to join their moral crusade against communism, which they depicted as evil. John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State in the early years of the cold war declared neutrality as "immoral". He wanted every nation to stand up against communism, the modern day equivalent of terrorism and be counted on the American side. Some nations from the developing world, including Pakistan joined the Western security pact that were motivated more by their regional geopolitics than the cold war concerns of the United States. Nevertheless, they were part of the alliances and believed that such a policy would serve their national interests better than neutrality.

The leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement didn't share this view. They thought getting dragged into military alliances would only increase the risk of a war of global dimensions, while staying away would impress upon the competing powers that the majority of the peoples around the world stood against strategic competition and war. They defended their position in a very difficult international climate when international assistance for development was being used as bait for military cooperation. Every new nation wanted access to the American financial and technological resources for reconstruction and development. Not that they were denied this access, it was more readily available to partners than to countries standing on the neutral ground.

Non-Alignment was more than a third force; it was an ideology of foreign policy, a voice from the developing world and a marker of distinctive identity of the new nations entering the world stage for the first time. Despite differences among the developing countries on number bilateral and regional issues, the NAM in its first decade was successful in bringing to the attention of the world specific problems that the developing countries faced. Its spirit, however, lied in an independent foreign policy on the divisive ideological and security issues between the superpowers and their close allies.

The NAM underwent a second transformation in its global outlook in the 1970s, as the issues of poverty, underdevelopment, global inequality, debt and aid became more



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salient than the cold war concerns. By this time, the superpowers understood the risks of nuclear conflagration and had begun to reshape their relations within the framework of détente. This removed the heavy pressure on the non-aligned countries for taking sides and even loosened the existing alliances, relieving countries like Pakistan of security commitments. The economic development issues that divided the rich industrialised North and the poor South of the globe marked a new di-

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vision in international relations parallel to the cold war, but dominated by economic issues. The NAM spirit, diplomatic experience and the organisational work span off the Group of 77 and many other forums of this kind to debate problems facing the developing world.

With winding down of the cold war and many attending changes in the world system, many observers also predicted the demise of the Non-Aligned Movement. Many indeed wondered what would be the relevance of a movement that was influenced by the cold war. In fact, end of the cold war has given the NAM a clearer direction and has freed it of the tensions that it experienced as the two rival superpowers attempted to shape its agenda and focus of its deliberations through their informal allies in the developing world.

Today, the NAM in its composition is a global organisation representing countries with different cultures, civilisations, political systems and levels of economic development. What unites them together and bring them to this fold is a sense of common identity as developing nations with more or less similar problems. Such a large body comprising 116 countries from almost every corner of the world cannot be expected to adopt or pursue a similar set of foreign policies. They will not,

but on global economic and security issues their common position would give considerable weight to their initiatives. Neither of the two sets of issues is going to leave us. They will continue to recur and visit us again and again because inequality and conflict are part of human existence. While trying to remove their causes on permanent basis, it would be important to control and manage them better.

In my opinion, NAM has neither lost relevance nor its direction. The issues that the first generation of leaders from the developing countries had addressed are still with us. Looking at the speeches delivered by world leaders early this week and the declaration that they issued at the end of this gathering speaks of the same problems that earlier generation did. Does it suggest that the NAM has failed in resolving them? Heaping that blame on the NAM would be unfair. As indicated earlier, the problems of conflict and inequality are structural and part of the international political system within which the modern nation states function. In such a system successes are partial and based on collective efforts and bargaining position. But when we solve one set of problems another may crop up. This is an unending cycle and the movements like NAM stay relevant by changing focus and strategies.

This change is demonstrated by its recent and previous declarations. In the area of political economy, the NAM stresses alleviation of poverty in the developing world by means of greater allocation of development assistance, debt relief, market accessibility, transfer of technology and capital. Manipulation of money markets, as it was deliberately done in case of Malaysia a few years back, is a new concern that the NAM declaration has highlighted. The question of equitable distribution of rewards in the emerging globalisation is yet another serious problem that the developing countries would continue to raise at every forum.

Once again, the NAM has taken a right moral position against Washington's unilateral military action against Iraq and Israel's continuing repression of the Palestinian people. The meeting and the declaration have come at a critical time when the international public opinion is against war. Will a common outcry against war by 116 countries halt the American march toward war or prevent Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians is a difficult question. But by taking firm position on these two ongoing crises, the NAM makes itself a true representative of a global sentiment and even more relevant to our changing world.