



A Renewed Non-Aligned Movement

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Abstract

As the Russia-Ukraine war continues spreading human misery in its wake, more and more countries are being impacted directly or indirectly by it, bringing the world perilously close to a 1960s like Cold War scenario. As the world becomes divided once again, it is time for the Non-Aligned Movement to take its place in the world again. The Movement was founded to replace division, distrust and the threat of war with world unity, peace and development. A renewed and strengthened Non-Aligned Movement can provide the much needed dynamic, creative, values-based leadership we need today, and contribute to world peace.

The world has a compelling need for a clear, calm, brave and honest voice that can be heard above the din of war. The Non-Aligned Movement can supply this voice.

Seventy years ago, the world was similar to how it is today in some ways. Two rival power blocs were competing with each other. Both wanted to extend their spheres of influence, and different regions of the world became the unfortunate theatres of their play. It was also a period of decolonization that led to the creation of many newly independent countries in Asia and Africa. Leaders of these and other countries in the developing world wished to check imperialism, neo-colonialism, competitive bloc politics and military alliances. They all had a common interest in economic development, nation building and peaceful co-existence. Aligning with one of the two sides and getting involved in the bloc competition and arms race would perpetuate underdevelopment. Representatives from 29 of these countries met in Bandung, Indonesia at the Asian-African Conference in 1955 to focus on peace, human rights and economic development. The leaders sought greater collaboration in the developing world and reduced reliance on either of the two power blocs. This led to the movement of non-alignment.

The 1st Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement was convened in Belgrade in 1961 under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Sukarno of Indonesia. 25 countries participated in the event and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was officially launched. The movement gave a voice to emerging nations and proved to the world and more importantly to the fledgling countries themselves that they could be a force in world politics. Since then, NAM has grown to include 120 countries from Asia, Africa, South America and Eastern Europe representing 55% of the world population. It is the largest grouping of countries after the United Nations.

NAM is dedicated to the interests and aspirations of developing countries. It has no formal constitution. All member countries have equal rights within the organization. Its positions are reached by consensus in the Summit conferences which are convened every three years. With the end of the Cold War, the movement's focus shifted from non-alignment to multilateralism, economic development and international cooperation.

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The war in Ukraine calls for a neutral organization such as NAM to step in and work for peace. It is not certain that UN Resolutions, trade embargos and economic sanctions against Russia can have an impact on the Russian leadership. But they are certainly causing an entire nation to suffer for the crimes of a few individuals. In addition, they have led to food shortage and starvation in Asia and Africa. They have disrupted supply chains the world over. Punitive measures of the victors of World War I led to World War II. Triumphalism of the winning side of the Cold War has led to what is today being called Cold War 2.0. NATO has announced that it is planning for a permanent military presence on its border in the future. Russia's strategic nuclear deterrents have been placed on high alert. It is time for countries that refuse to be aligned with one or the other side to step in, mediate, and secure peace. NAM, which has functioned successfully in similar conditions before, has a very significant role to play today.

The advantage of a non-aligned view is that it can see from both competing points of view. It can integrate contradicting perspectives and convert them into complementing parts of a whole. Victors tend to write history. They decide who is right and who is wrong, and determine punishments and reparations at the end of war. This version does not always coincide with the truth. It takes a neutral party to see the whole.

“There are many things happening in the world from year to year and day to day, which we have disliked intensely. We have not condemned them... because when one is trying to solve a problem, it doesn't help calling names and condemning,” Nehru explained in 1957 after Soviet intervention in Hungary. Non-alignment is not isolation, indifference or irresponsibility. It is a positive and dynamic approach with the aim to solve the problem. Emotions have a significant influence on cognition and effective functioning. When emotions run high between two conflicting sides, both become reactive, and the situation turns volatile. NAM as mediator can see both points of view better. It can be more tolerant of the constraints and compulsions of each side. It can prevent one side from construing the position of the other in a mischievous, prejudiced or mistaken manner. A genuine offer by one side is not discounted or misread but interpreted objectively. NAM can sincerely work for the quick resolution of the conflict and resumption of normalcy. The NAM countries spread throughout

the developing world are most affected today after Ukraine and Russia, and stand to gain from world peace and progress. Such a method that works for both sides can make way for the end of conflict, and equally importantly, ensure that it does not recur years or decades later.

NAM has had its own challenges and weaknesses. However, as former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi described, it is the largest peace movement in the world. At the height of the Cold War, it played an active role in containing the expansion of the rival blocs, preventing regional conflicts, calling for equality and human rights. It has given voice to the Global South. The world situation calls for a repetition of these achievements.

NAM is needed not just to bring peace to Ukraine. The list of countries that have been the victim of the egos of belligerent power blocs is long—Iran, Iraq, Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, Syria, and many other countries in East Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. Ukraine is the most recent, caught between the West's keenness to assert its preeminent position in the global order and Russia's imperial nostalgia. To put an end to the scourge of war in Ukraine, and for sustained global peace, we need an improved and strengthened Non-Aligned Movement that gives expression to the views of sincere, honest reason and goodwill.

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