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## **THE FUTURE OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT**

The Non-aligned Movement, since its emergence, has often been subjected to varied and conflicting interpretations as to its philosophy, motivation and objectives; it has evoked strange emotions ranging from outright adulation to slander and attack. To its many adherents, the Movement symbolises the quest of mankind for an equitable and just world order free from domination and exploitation of the weak by the powerful; an end to the era of colonialism and imperialism and the emergence of a world of sovereign states free from interference, coercion and intimidation wherein every people would enjoy its inalienable right to choose freely its own form of social, economic and political system. To the detractors of the Non-aligned Movement, it represents a heterogeneous amalgam of nations having nothing in common and held together through hatred and animosity of the former colonial countries. Charges of opportunism have been levelled and some have gone to the extent of calling Non-alignment "as a sort of blackmailing of the Big Powers"; detractors openly criticise the inclusion of members who have overt or implicit alliances with the Great Powers, and point to the disunity and disputes among member states. Allegations have been made that



certain organised radical groups have been successfully directing the Movement along a deviationist path—an identifiable ideological orientation which has eroded the viability of Non-alignment.

For a clear understanding of the essence of Non-alignment and for an appraisal of its future role, it is important to briefly review the genesis of the Movement its organisation, and its evolution. From a strictly historical viewpoint, it is rather difficult to pinpoint a particular date or day for the birth of the Movement. The forces and undercurrent of the Non-aligned Movement were set in motion since the end of the Second World War when the struggle against colonialism and imperialism started to gather momentum. However, in a more formal sense, the Non-aligned Movement may trace its origin from the joint initiative by President Tito of Yugoslavia, President Abdel Nasser of Egypt and President Soekarno of Indonesia, who were joined by the Prime Minister of India Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru and the Government of Afghanistan, to issue an invitation to 21 Heads of State/Government suggesting that in view of recent world developments and a dangerous increase of international tension—a conference might be held for the improvement of international relations, the relinquishment of a policy of force and, the constructive settlement of pending world issues and conflicts. Accordingly, the first summit conference of the Non-aligned Movement was held in Belgrade in September 1961. Twenty-five nations and three observers attended this conference.



However, the historic Bandung Conference of 1955 may well be called the forerunner of the Non-aligned Movement. At that time, frequent references were made to the concept of neutrality. This was later to annex to itself the adjective "positive" and finally emerged as 'Non-alignment'.

The role of the Non-aligned Movement was largely influenced and inspired by three important factors :

Firstly, the Movement emerged at the height of the cold war, in a world polarised into two super-power blocs. Such an artificial and rigid compartmentalisation of the world into blocs not only threatened world peace and stability but militated against the very concept of sovereign equality and independence of the medium-sized and smaller countries. Non-aligned nations clearly perceived the dangers inherent in such a situation and sought to pursue an independent path free from bloc rivalry, influence and polarisation which would enable them to promote peaceful and equitable relations among all nations irrespective of size, power and ideology. Non-aligned countries were determined that they would no longer remain passive spectators of the international scene and with this end in view vigorously pursued, from the beginning, the goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control and the ending of the arms race, particularly the nuclear arms race.

Secondly, the Movement more or less coincided with the demise of colonialism. Having been subjected to domination, exploitation and the humiliation of



racial discrimination, the Non-aligned countries were determined never to compromise with colonialism or racialism in any form.

Thirdly, Non-aligned countries clearly recognised that political independence would be meaningless without economic independence. The aspirations and expectations of their people were naturally high, as they idealistically believed that political independence would instantly usher into an era of plenty and prosperity. However, their people were soon to be disillusioned and their frustration and disillusionment generated political instability and chaos in these countries. Most of these Non-aligned countries even after independence remained overwhelmingly dependent on their former colonial masters and soon realised that they were under a new form of tutelage called Neo-colonialism. To liquidate this dependency relationship with the former rulers, diversify trade and secure fair and equitable prices for the export of their raw materials, became a rallying cry of the Non-aligned countries.

Thus from its very inception a fundamental element of non-aligned policy was promotion of the cause of economic development of poorer nations with its twin objectives of accelerating growth and alleviating poverty. A pressing priority was the need to strengthen not only co-ordination and co-operation among member states but jointly to enhance their ability and solidarity in negotiating with developed countries. The concept and adherence to the principle of collective and individual self-reliance became an integral element of



non-aligned policy.

The pursuit of growth and the fight against poverty required intensive efforts by the developing world — virtually a war for survival. But it was also recognised that these efforts and this war would not succeed without support. It demanded global co-operation; co-operation in which resources, labour and technology would be shared equitably among nations for their common benefit; co-operation which would induce extensive adjustments to changing patterns of production, consumption, trade and comparative advantage; co-operation that would generate new sources of growth, enhance aggregate demand that would foster greater industrialisation and lead to decisive progress in food and agricultural productivity. These were the critical elements in the non-aligned countries' call for a total restructuring of the world's economic relationship through a New International Economic Order.

These, then, were the basic priorities of the Non-aligned Movement which gave substance and meaning to the cardinal principles and objectives and continue to form its bedrock.

It would be useful at this stage to take a look at the organisational structure of the Non-aligned Movement. In the first place, the independent character and voluntary nature of the movement have, from the outset, eschewed the need for a constitution, charter or even rules of procedure to govern their activities.

Second: Non-aligned countries do not have a permanent secretariat since they firmly believe that this



would only institutionalise their movement. They function through the periodic convening of conferences at the summit level held every three years. In the intervening period between conferences, the movement functions through the Co-ordinating Bureau which is the organ entrusted, as its name suggests, with the co-ordination of their joint activities aimed at implementing the decisions and programmes adopted at summit conferences and other meetings of the Non-aligned. The Co-ordinating Bureau meets on a continuing basis at the level of permanent representatives of Non-aligned countries in New York at the UN Headquarters, once a month as a rule and, at the level of Foreign Ministers, once a year or as necessary. For practical purposes, membership of the Bureau is limited initially 17 (Algiers), then 25 (Colombo) and now 33 (Havana) chosen by the Summit Conference taking into consideration principles of balanced geographical distribution, continuity and rotation.

Third: Membership of the Non-aligned Movement, from the original 25 countries that attended the First Summit Conference in Belgrade in 1961 has now grown to 95 at the Sixth Summit Conference in Havana. Full members also include national liberation movements such as the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe will no doubt now join the movement as a country instead of being represented by a liberation movement) and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). In addition, the Non-aligned Movement has



20 observers which include states, organisations and national liberation movements. The basic criteria governing membership have remained unchanged since the Cairo Summit in 1964. These were :

- (i) The country should have adopted an independent policy based on co-existence of states with different political and social systems and on non-alignment or should be showing a trend in favour of such a policy.
- (ii) The country concerned should be consistently supporting the movements for national independence.
- (iii) The country should not be member of a multilateral military alliance concluded in the context of great power conflicts.
- (iv) If a country has a bilateral military agreement with a great power or is a member of a regional defence pact, the agreement or pact should not be one deliberately concluded in the context of great power conflicts.
- (v) If it has conceded military bases to a foreign power, the concession should not have been made in the context of great power conflicts.

Fourth : a factor of crucial importance and which underscores the voluntary nature of the Non-aligned Movement is that all decisions of the Movement are taken by consensus and not by vote.

Looking back at the progress of Non-alignment in the past 18 years, the record is one of some accomplishment. It has undoubtedly contributed to the



process of detente and defusion of international tension. It has played an indispensable role in the process of decolonisation and in eradicating racism and racial discrimination. It has provided a major thrust in efforts for disarmament and it may be recalled that Non-aligned initiative was directly responsible for the convening of the historic tenth special session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament in 1978. It has helped in the promotion of social and economic development by fostering the twin goals of self-reliance and greater cooperation among member-states and by mobilising efforts for major structural changes towards a New Just International Order. Above all, the very size of the movement consisting of 95 members from four continents, representing peoples from all established religions, races, cultures and political systems is ample evidence of the success of the movement as an alternative to the division of the world into blocs and the absorption of the smaller states within this polarised system.

Let us now turn to the problems facing the movement. It is no secret that ever since the Non-aligned Foreign Ministers' meeting in Belgrade in 1978, the Non-aligned Movement has been in a state of turmoil and conflict, so much so that at Belgrade it was agreed to establish an open-ended working group to find ways and means for strengthening unity, solidarity and cooperation among the Non-aligned countries. The anxieties and misgivings regarding the movement surfaced openly at the Sixth Summit Conference in Havana. In his speech to the Conference President Ziaur Rahman stated :



“What appears to be extremely distressing to us are the armed conflicts that are taking place. In some cases, these conflicts have taken the tragic form of armed action by one Non-aligned country against another. Such gross violations of the basic principles of our movement cannot but undermine the unity and solidarity of the movement. We fervently hope that one Non-aligned country will not intervene or interfere in the internal affairs of another Non-aligned country”.

These expressions merely underscored the pre-occupations, fears and misgivings among the members about the direction of the movement. There were fears that certain radical members were directing the movement along a deviationist path away from its position as an independent force in international politics and thereby compromise its non-bloc character.

Under the impetus of this aroused self-appraisal, the Sixth Summit Conference in Havana achieved significant results. It belied the accusation that voices of moderate member-states were muted, for many rose in the defence of the genuine principles of Non-alignment. The declaration adopted by the conference is a vindication of the fundamental principles of Non-alignment, its independent character and non-bloc orientation.

However, the recent Soviet actions in Afghanistan, a Non-aligned country and one of the founding members of the Movement has forcefully brought to the fore some of the serious shortcomings of the Non-aligned Movement. It is, without, exaggeration one of the most serious challenges to the Movement and an acid



test of the validity of its principles. The events in Afghanistan have raised anew some of the agonising questions about the future role and direction of the Movement which were raised at the Havana Summit. It is true that the overwhelming majority of the Non-aligned countries have taken a strong, forceful and principled stand at the UN on the Afghan problem; but one cannot easily explain away the inaction and paralysis of the Movement in the face of such a critical challenge to the Movement. The answer to these agonising questions would depend on the extent and the manner of the non-aligned response to the situation in Afghanistan.

The policy of non-alignment is the cornerstone of the foreign policy of Bangladesh. Bangladesh became a member of the Non-aligned Movement at the Algiers Summit in 1973. Since then, we have participated at all important Non-aligned meetings. President Ziaur Rahman, before being elected President, was a member of the Bangladesh delegation to the Non-aligned Summit in Colombo. He led the Bangladesh delegation to the Non-aligned Summit Conference which took place in Havana in September last year. Bangladesh played a leading role at the Havana Conference in the formulation of those parts of the Communique which dealt with the principles and objectives of the Movement. Bangladesh also played an active role in the formulation of the comprehensive economic action programme which was adopted at the Havana Summit. It was largely due to the Bangladesh initiative that the proposal on Food



Security was adopted. Bangladesh was also able to persuade the Movement to endorse the action programme for the least developed countries without any dilution or reservation. At Havana, Bangladesh was elected Vice-Chairman of the Conference and President Ziaur Rahman was called upon to deliver the reply speech at the inaugural session on behalf of the Asian countries. Bangladesh was also elected to the Co-ordinating Bureau for a half term.

Some of the shortcomings observed in recent years raised doubts about the future of the movement which has so far played a significant role in shaping contemporary history. However, the strength of the Movement lies in the abiding nature of the principles which it embodies. The principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of one another, mutual respect for each others sovereignty and territorial integrity are fundamental principles on which the international community has to depend for its survival and progress. Similarly, the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racialism and apartheid reflect the hopes and aspirations of mankind for a better world. It is on the bedrock of these principles that a world free from the scourges of war, violence, disease, pestilence, hunger and malnutrition can be built. There can be no enduring structure of international peace without universal acceptance of these principles. The Non-aligned Movement thus represents a dynamic and a progressive force. It is destined to play its role in establishing a just and equitable world order of the future.