

*Md. Muhibbur Rahman*

## **NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY: TEHRAN SUMMIT AND ITS AFTERMATH**

---

---

### **Abstract**

The paper seeks to critically examine post-Cold War relevance of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), drawing a premise on the significance of Tehran Summit, held during 30-31 August 2012, in revitalising the Movement in the changing context of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tehran Summit adjudged the continuing importance of NAM as an alternative platform for international cooperation and reinvigorated a commitment to promote a multi-centric world and to establish just global governance by rebuilding international order. On the other hand, the Summit failed to uphold the collective concerns of the developing countries and was more of a reflection of the political realities of the Middle East, predominantly Iran-West confrontation over Iran's nuclear programme and Iranian backings for Syrian regime. Dissecting the critical propositions over NAM, the paper finds that future of NAM would be determined by its ability to represent the interests of the third world, taking an independent discourse and playing a more active role in international politics in the coming decades. But the path would be thorny since increasing NAM memberships do not translate into strengthening of NAM's capability at the same scale due to their lack of strong commitment to the ideology of non-alignment. Besides, there can be manipulation over NAM from within particularly by powerful members. The paper concludes that NAM could explore huge potential by extending its mandate and addressing effectively the contemporary challenges for its member states including civil unrest, human security issues, environmental vulnerabilities, economic underdevelopment, and so on. For NAM to keep its appeal alive, it needs to adjust its agenda with the changing international conditions.

### **1. Introduction**

The post-Cold War scholarship in the academic debate over Non Aligned Movement (NAM) underlies a dwindling image of the Movement's existence and significance. With the end of bipolarity, critical proponents ascribed NAM as a 'dead horse', or an old lion taking rest after a series of hunting attempts, or the 'victim of its own success'<sup>1</sup>, indicating the diminishing space for the diplomacy

---

**Md. Muhibbur Rahman** is Research Officer at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Dhaka, Bangladesh. His e-mail address is: [tanzimdu@gmail.com](mailto:tanzimdu@gmail.com).

© Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), 2012.

of neutrality and of equidistance. While mainstream arguments favour this view in general, alternative voices have rather an opposing stance, arguing for a revival of NAM after overcoming the post-Cold War burden of existential pessimism. They argue that though the dispensation of the Cold War under which NAM came into existence is no-longer present, but small and developing countries are encountering similar concerns in the post Cold War world. Weaker states are very much dependent on the economic and military safety packages of the United States of America (USA) and other rising powers and, thereby subjugated by the hegemonic practices and interferences in their exercise of national imperatives. Western military bloc-politics is rather coalesced to adjoin even non-aligned countries in pursuing its military involvements, under the cover of fighting extremism and trans-national terrorism, in Afghanistan, Iraq and also against North Korea, Iran and other so called failed and rogue states.

The 16<sup>th</sup> NAM Summit held in Tehran from 30-31 August 2012, in this backdrop, advanced the debate in the contemporary political agenda. Bringing representatives from 120 countries, many of those are the big allies of the USA, the Summit, not only put many controversial issues forward but also adjudged the continuing significance of NAM as an alternative platform for international cooperation particularly for the developing nations. The Summit advocated many issues of global scale including nuclear disarmament, Palestinian independent statehood, right of every country to pursue peaceful nuclear energy, combating Islamophobia and so on.<sup>2</sup> As usual, Western reactions had a lukewarm attitude towards the summit and tried to make the gains of Iran lighter by asking allies and the UN Secretary General to avoid the Summit, propagating the death and irrelevance of such movement, and aggrandising the hosting country over the greater objectives of NAM. However, questions have been raised whether disputed image of Iran, the host of the Summit, rather than NAM itself is the reason behind this intense propagation, as critiques claimed that Iran used the Summit to endorse its agenda and the Summit reflected more of regional political realities than the collective aspirations of the non-aligned countries.

The objective of this paper is to critically examine the post-Cold War relevance of Non-Aligned Movement. Drawing a premise on the significance of Tehran Summit in revitalising the Movement in the changing context of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the paper dissects the critical propositions on the essential aspects of the existence of NAM in the post-Cold War world and its future prospect in upholding the mission that the founders of the movement cherished back in 1950s. The essential questions, hence, to ask are whether NAM loses the

---

<sup>1</sup> Emajuddin Ahmed, "The Group of 77: Has it any future?", *Dhaka Courier*, 12 May 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Syed Fattahul Alam, "Does NAM still have significance", *The Daily Star*, 03 September 2012.

justifications of its existence in the post-Cold War world and whether Tehran Summit serves as the beginning of the revival of NAM movement?

To put the analysis in proper order, the paper provides a conceptual framework at the beginning to clarify the approaches used in assessing the questions that have been raised. Then, a brief historical overview will be given to see the original idea, context and functions of NAM within the Cold War era along with the development of critical discourse over NAM's significance after the end of bipolarity. In the next section, the paper examines critically the issues and implications of the Tehran Summit in the regional and global political contexts. Finally the paper ends with an attempt to see the significance and the future prospect of NAM, by dealing with the challenges in the aftermath of Tehran Summit.

## **2. Shifting Non-Aligned Movement: Conceptual Framework**

At the macro level, as Kenneth Waltz rightly considered, the systemic imperatives drive the foreign policy actions of an individual state or states acting in groups.<sup>3</sup> The post World War II systemic transformation leading to Cold War bipolarity forced small states, frightened by the expansion of big countries' interests, to pursue collective bargaining, unlike the traditional balance of power game, as a struggle for national self-determination based on the principle of neutrality and of equidistance.<sup>4</sup> The idea of Non-Aligned Movement, representing such pursuit, was imputed with the responsibility of defending the interests of the small and newly independent states, appraised in terms of protecting national sovereignty in the post-colonial chaos and preventing forced-involvement in the superpowers' rivalry during the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Though coined in a more idealist perspective of seeking Afro-Asian solidarity, NAM was more of consequences of bipolar strategic bandwagoning of the USA in the western end and the Soviet Union in the socialist end, dragging small states into the hostilities of two superpowers. But does this perspective frame the continuing relevance of NAM, as the end of Cold War ending the bipolarity, in a changing international context of either a unipolar or a multi-polar world? What considerations are essential to assess NAM's significance and relevance to contemporary international developments?

Any comprehensive assessment on the relevance and the future of NAM particularly in the aftermath of Tehran Summit requires the identification of proper analytical framework comprising the elements of relevant concepts and

---

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, The State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, New York: Colombia University Press, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Y. Etinger (ed.), *NAM History and Reality: A Study*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> A. W. Singham and Shirley Hune, *Non-Alignments in the Age of Alignments*, London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986.

theories. The conceptual organisation of NAM is based on three perspectives: firstly, a *right based approach* that defines NAM as an expression of the struggle for rightful equality and national self-determination for the third world countries; secondly, a *compulsion approach* that conditions NAM as a product of the politics of Cold War bipolarity; and thirdly, *strategy oriented approach* that gives NAM the credit of practicing diplomatic neutrality and equidistance in the polarised world. An essential distinction between ‘Non-Alignment’ and ‘Non-Aligned Movement’ is often useful in this regard. While ‘Non Alignment’ denotes the principle of neutrality and equidistance from the probable polarisations, ‘Non-Aligned Movement’ is itself a kind of polarisation being an organised and collective reflection on the principle of ‘Non-Alignment’. This dichotomisation grants three probable approaches to NAM: a) as a principle in foreign policy decision making, b) as a form of collective alliance building strategy to pursue egalitarian objectives and c) as an institutional platform for intra-South development (e.g. South-South cooperation)<sup>6</sup> Apportioning the proper focus on what approach should be used to deal with the post Cold War NAM is critical to the understanding of NAM’s viability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Using theoretical schemes, the paper though very briefly, attempts to systematically frame ‘Non-Aligned Movement’ in the changing context. *Classical realist* standpoint favours the maximisation of power either by force or being allied with the force and the pursuit of an interest-serving strategy flexible in terms of changing enemies instead of changing interests. Two basic realist premises can be used to assess NAM’s viability: 1) international politics is a zero sum game among the power seeking states to recognise one another as independent state, but never accept the principle of non-intervention unconditionally;<sup>7</sup> and 2) the semblance of order and security can be maintained by shifting alliances among states, preventing one state from being overwhelmingly powerful.<sup>8</sup> Both suggest a persistent image of a conflicting international structure, whether unipolar or multipolar, dominated by the powerful states leaving security threats, as did during the Cold War, to the less powerful that justifies the continued relevance of NAM. At the same time, as realists emphasise primarily on the pursuit of power and national interests, there is a high likelihood of shifting of alliances and changing of commitments by member states and, also the increasing scope for manipulation of NAM by powerful members (Iran, for instance, enjoying the status of its leadership for next three years). In that condition the existence of NAM would rather be of ideal in nature with limited efficacy.

---

<sup>6</sup> M. S. Rajan, “The NAM Summit and Nonalignment”, *World Focus*, Vol. 279, 2003, pp. 3-5.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Jackson and George Sorenson, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Jill Steans and Lloyed Pettiford, *Introduction to International Relations: Perspectives and Themes*, London: Longman, 2005, pp. 49-52.

*Structural realists*, adopting most of the propositions of classical realists, have a marginally different position due to its focus on the primacy of anarchic international system determining states' motives and actions. Hence, they acknowledge that the continued significance of NAM is reduced immensely due to the international structural change after the end of Cold War but there is a potential of using NAM platform to collectively participate and increase the stake of global South in the international systemic distribution of power. On the other hand, economic interdependence model, in the form of both neo-liberal and neo-Marxist interpretations, tends to construe NAM in political-economic terms, taking two opposite positions. *Neo-liberals*, favouring free trade and economic cooperation, advocate the eventual economic integration that enhances economic capability through higher level of trade and investment beyond borders. Premising on the notion that cooperation is never without problems and states shift loyalty if they are provided with more opportunities,<sup>9</sup> neo-liberals see a diminishing space for NAM caused by the rise of economic regionalism and regional institutional cooperation such as European Union (EU), North Atlantic Free Trade Area (NAFTA), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), unless NAM can function as a platform of economic cooperation. In contrast, *neo-Marxists*, focusing on patron-client relationship in international political-economic structure and the development of the North in exchange of underdevelopment in South, accept the viability of NAM and advocate the necessity to strengthen the Movement to fight what they call 'neo-colonial chain of oppression'. The above discussed theoretical dispositions relating the relevance of NAM is further summarised in the following table:

**Table 1: Theoretical Schemes**

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Position</b>
Classical Realism	Pursuit of power and national interest; zero-sum and conflicting international structure	Likelihood of shifting of alliances; changing commitments of the member states; and increasing scope for manipulation of NAM
Structural Realism	Primacy of anarchic international system; international structural change after the end of Cold War	Reduced significance of NAM; potential of NAM to promote the stake of small states
Neo-liberalism	Economic integration; free trade	Diminishing space for NAM caused by the rise of economic regionalism; NAM's function as a platform of economic cooperation
Neo-Marxism	Patron-client relationship; Underdevelopment in the South	Viability of NAM; necessity to strengthen the movement

<sup>9</sup> John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, *The Globalization of World Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 132.

### 3. Genesis of NAM and the Question of Contemporary Relevance

In the post World War II period, the division of the world into two counterbalancing strategic bandwagons led by two superpowers and their systematic attempts, either by persuasion or by force, to drag the newly independent countries in their respective spheres of influence compelled these states to develop 'Non-Aligned Movement' platform so that they could participate in the international decision making process, keeping distance from both the military blocs.<sup>10</sup> The concept of NAM emerged through a gradual process.<sup>11</sup> NAM was the collective aspiration for Afro-Asian solidarity by the then Indian Premier Jawaharlal Nehru, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, and Indonesian President Sukarno. Though the first gesture of passive non-alignment was found in the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in 1947, and so was in the Conference on Indonesia in 1949 to express protest against the Dutch intervention in Indonesia, the Asia-Africa Conference held at Bandung of Indonesia in 1955 set the matrix and parametres of the original idea of NAM.<sup>12</sup> NAM as a formal institutional platform started its journey with first NAM Summit at Belgrade in 1961, attended by 25 member states and 3 observers. The movement underwent a steady increase in the number of its members reaching 120 till Tehran Summit 2012.

NAM constituted a third influential bloc independent of both eastern and western camps during the Cold War era.<sup>13</sup> It inaugurated political upliftment of Afro-Asian states in international political stage and marked the beginning of a new era in global politics.<sup>14</sup> With constant opposition from the superpowers and their allies, NAM has been working against heavy odds particularly resource scarcity<sup>15</sup>, demographic pressure, high exodus of population, economic underdevelopment and ethno-political instability all around the developing world. The long journey of the movement can be divided into three broad phases based on the changes of its priorities.<sup>16</sup> In the first phase, NAM was a movement of national liberation that extended its moral and political support for the Afro-Asian and Latin American countries in their struggle against colonial domination. As the Cold War military grouping aroused fear of the newly independent

<sup>10</sup> L. K. Choudhury and Sanjeev Kumar, "Problem and Prospect of NAM in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", *India Quarterly*, Vol. LIX, No 1 & 2, 2003, pp. 121-153.

<sup>11</sup> Chitta Biswas, "Relevance of NAM", *World Focus*, Vol. 279, 2003, pp. 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> L. K. Choudhury and Sanjeev Kumar, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Ala' Alrababa'h, "Significance of NAM", *The Daily Star*, 07 September 2012.

<sup>14</sup> L. K. Choudhury and Sanjeev Kumar, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Developed world having 30 per cent of the world population enjoys 80 per cent of the world resources while developing world owns only 20 per cent of resources to meet the demand of more than 70 per cent of the world population. See L. K. Choudhury and Sanjeev Kumar, *ibid*, p. 128.

<sup>16</sup> Pankaj Bhan, "NAM: Rites of Rebirth", *World Focus*, Vol. 279, 2003, p. 6.

countries over the superpowers' aim at turning them into mere pawns in their power game<sup>17</sup>, NAM started to switch its focus on advocating a free course of action independent of the influence of both the superpowers based on neutrality and equidistance, a disputed principle during the Cold War<sup>18</sup>, by taking independent position on all issues affecting international security. The third phase, on the other hand, was a shift from political to economic agenda that guided NAM policies in most part since 1970s. NAM, aiming to correct the economic imbalance inherited from colonialism, and to attain economic development of the member states through collective self-reliance, launched a wide range of economic programmes<sup>19</sup>, notably the establishment of the UNCTAD and the formation of Group of 77.<sup>20</sup> A New International Economic Order aimed at fighting lack of technology, severe unequal competition in the world market and excessive dependence on foreign aid was put forward. With the end of the Cold War, NAM was, though continued to have regular conferences, undergone degenerating attitude not only from the side of the critiques but also among many of its member countries.

With the 'End of History', as coined by Francis Fukuyama to define the victory of liberal Western bloc over socialist Soviet bloc, many critical proponents, who had long been highlighting a negative image of NAM, protruded the death of Non-Alignment as a viable principle of Third World solidarity movement. Some critics argued that the concept of nonalignment was redundant and therefore it lost its relevance in the present day world. They termed NAM as ineffective, powerless and disunited in the contemporary international political setting.<sup>21</sup> This despair over continued relevance of NAM came out from the diminishing significance of the politics of neutrality and the lack of any visible role played by NAM in today's world particularly in relation to the controversial 'War on Terror'. Therefore, post Cold War critical discourse over NAM involved two dimensions:

- i. *Contextual irrelevance* meaning that the end of bipolarity and of patron-client proxies of Cold War not only made the underlying necessity of a non-aligned front invalid but also predominantly reduced its ability to act in the changing polarity of power.

---

<sup>17</sup> Md. Altaf Hossain, "NAM in the Changing World Scenario", *BISS Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 1990, pp. 338-358.

<sup>18</sup> NAM's principle of equidistance was often proximated by the pro-West quarters to the worldview of communism, indicating a symbiotic relationship between NAM and Soviet bloc. See Pankaj Bhan, 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> NAM conferences in 1970s and 1980s particularly Cairo Conference in 1964 and Algiers Conference in 1973 stressed the economic development of the Third World as the top priority. See Md. Altaf Hossain, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 341.

<sup>21</sup> L. K. Choudhury and Sanjeev Kumar, *op. cit.*

- ii. *Functional irrelevance* meaning that movement for solidarity existed only in declaration and it lacked strength to play viable role to uphold the mission that it cherished.

Three main reasons had been attributed to the failure of NAM in advancing both of its political and economic agendas: (1) NAM members lacked commitment to the ideology of non-alignment; (2) many member states were unable to achieve a reasonable degree of economic independence from the developed world; and (3) the rise of regional economic groupings, viz., ASEAN, SAARC, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) and so on, that divided the third world into many regional blocs.<sup>22</sup> While these criticisms tended to occupy the entire critical discourse over NAM, issues including globalisation induced challenges to the small states, transnational security threats, cooperation among the countries of global South, rise of multiple power centers and future of weak states in face of neo-colonial interventions as Responsibility to Protect (R2P)<sup>23</sup> and humanitarian war and so on, on the other hand, rather argued the necessity and strengthening of a movement like NAM in a new fashion. The recent developments associated with the 16<sup>th</sup> NAM Summit held in Tehran brought this debate at the forefront of analysis over NAM.

#### 4. Tehran Summit: Revitalising NAM in Today's World

The 16<sup>th</sup> NAM Summit held in Tehran from 30-31 August 2012 staged a gathering of 120 member states of the world community - 29 heads of the states including the presidents of Afghanistan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sudan, Zimbabwe and the Palestinian Authority, and the emir of Qatar, the prime ministers of India, Iraq, Syria and Bangladesh. Other three-quarters were represented by senior officials: vice presidents, deputy prime ministers, foreign ministers and envoys.<sup>24</sup> Besides, 7 observer states and 10 member organisations including the UN, the African Union and the Arab League also joined to this second largest gathering after UN General Assembly.<sup>25</sup> The Tehran Summit ended up with a resolution having 700 clauses including nuclear disarmament, Palestinian independent statehood, right to peaceful nuclear energy, combating Islamophobia and so on. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei addressed the delegations along

---

<sup>22</sup> Md. Altaf Hossain, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> R2P is a United Nations' initiative established in 2005, consisting of a set of principles based on the idea that sovereignty is not a right, but a responsibility. It focuses on preventing and halting four crimes known as 'Mass Atrocity Crimes': genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

<sup>24</sup> "NAM Summit Opens at Tehran", *The Nation*, 30 August 2012, available at <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-dailyenglishonline/international/30-Aug-2012/nam-summit-opens-in-tehran>, accessed on 15 September 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Ashfaqur Rahman, "NAM Summit: Diplomatic boost for Iran", *The Daily Star*, 02 September 2012.



with Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, who handed the rotating NAM presidency over to Iran.<sup>26</sup>

The Summit was, as argued by many quarters, a beginning of a new era in the politics of non-alignment, voicing demands of the Third World that are mostly sidelined in the United Nations platforms. The Summit provided an opportunity for the attendees to voice their grievances ‘which have already gripped their nations by the neck’<sup>27</sup> and asserted collectively the feasibility of dialogue among civilisations in achieving global peace by utilising the prospect of NAM as a viable world platform. One of the distinct features was that it addressed, claiming as legitimate objectives of NAM, a number of thorny issues which the West, often argued by the anti-West quarters, misrepresented such as Iran’s nuclear energy programme, or underrated such as the Palestinian issue and the unauthorised US drone attacks which had claimed lives of many civilians in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen’.<sup>28</sup>

The context why Tehran Summit was making so much noise in the international political arena was the changing Middle Eastern regional political realities, the region where the Summit took place and most of the regional countries are NAM members. The region has been under a sudden historic change with the uprisings brought by so called ‘Arab Spring’. Iran hosted the Summit at a time when political uncertainty and tension was the highest in the region dictated by two major developments: (1) The USA and Israel had been threatening Iran openly with war over its nuclear programme and imposed economic sanctions to isolate the country from the world; and (2) uprising in Syria since March 2011 had degenerated into a bloody civil war because of the outside interference, threatening a wider conflict into the entire region.<sup>29</sup> This backdrop raised the question whether it was the Middle Eastern political issues and the host country Iran that brought the NAM Summit under intense criticism by outsiders of NAM who were in a stiffer confrontation with Iran.

#### **4.1. Agenda and Outcomes of the Summit**

Three major issues dominated the agenda of the Summit: the prevailing crisis in Syria, the Iranian nuclear programme and the question of Palestinian statehood. The Tehran Declaration, in a nutshell, stressed on the peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis without any foreign intervention, underlined the universal right to peaceful nuclear energy, condemned unilateral sanctions on

---

<sup>26</sup> “NAM Summit Opens at Tehran”, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> “NAM must reduce Washington influence, end SC servitude to US: Analyst”, *Press TV*, 02 September, 2012, available at <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/02/259501/nam-must-free-sc-from-us-servitude/>, accessed on 15 September 2012.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Mahmood Hasan, “Non-Aligned Movement: Not a dead horse”, *The Daily Star*, 06 September 2012.

Iran, called for the establishment of the state of Palestine, urged to address all forms of discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance, called for reform of the UN system particularly UN Security Council, emphasised on enhanced North-South and South-South Cooperation.<sup>30</sup> In an expression of solidarity with Ecuador, NAM Summit supported the country's stance against Great Britain over the asylum granted to Wikileaks Founder Julian Assange. The Summit called for dialogue among religions, cultures and civilisations, and checking all attempts of uniculturalism or the imposition of particular models of political, economic, social, legal or cultural systems. Besides, all forms of international terrorism were condemned in the Summit, urging all states to abide by their international obligations.

In the question of Palestinian statehood, attending countries demanded termination of occupation, crimes and violations committed by Israel, restoration of inalienable rights of Palestinian people to self-determination, and the establishment of an independent and viable state of Palestine with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, the key component of an equitable, comprehensive and lasting peace in Middle East.<sup>31</sup> On nuclear disarmament, the Summit voiced an imperative to conclude a comprehensive convention making it obligatory to destroy all nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework, as maintenance of strategic and tactical nuclear stockpile and their continued modernisation, as well as new military doctrines setting the rationale for their possible use represented the greatest threat to humankind. On the other hand, the Summit advocated, as validated by Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the basic and inalienable right to the development, research, production and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, without any discrimination and urges to show respects for the states' choices and decisions, in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear technology and their fuel cycle policies, including those of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>32</sup>

The reason why NAM Summit held in Tehran was a call for revitalising NAM in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century was the averment of member states to promote a multi-centric world supported by non-aligned nations against the so called post-modern trap of neo-colonialism<sup>33</sup> and establish joint global governance by rebuilding international order. The first issue of their claim, in this regard, underlies the extension of the horizon of global governance by encompassing many issues of global interest including security, social and environmental concerns rather than mere economic issues. Then comes the demand for revitalising the UN General Assembly as the centre of global

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Tehran Declaration, "The Declaration of the XVI Summit of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement", 30-31 August 2012, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Syed Fattahul Alam, *op. cit.*

governance to play a rudimentary role in institutional and legal framework and in reforming UN Security Council to reflect the realities of today's world. Lastly, the Summit asked the adequate representation of the growing importance of developing countries in the governance structures of existing international key decision-making bodies and to ensure a greater voice and participation in major institutions.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, which had long been aspiring a permanent membership at UN Security Council, while admitting to deficits in global governance, took a leading position on the issue of global governance reform and gave the key responsibility to NAM to "take the lead" in reforming international institutions.<sup>35</sup>

#### **4.2. NAM in the Pretext of Tehran's Agenda?**

In the aftermath of the Summit, a crucial question was raised that Tehran used the Summit to uphold its national interests. The analysts summed up four key objectives of Iran from the Summit: (1) a successful projection against USA and Israel by showing that international community did not endorse any support to USA's call for isolating Iran; (2) endorsement of Iran's nuclear programme by the second largest international community and legitimisation of nuclear options through a general norm of right to peaceful nuclear energy; (3) pushing support in favour of its ally government in Syria which was under international pressure to yield to the legitimate demand of the majority people who were fighting in the street; and (4) to receive leadership for next three years so that it could use NAM platform to resist Western pressure and confrontation for a longer period.

From the outcomes of the Summit, it was noticeable that Iran used the conference to convince its citizen that the world was with them and showed the USA and Israel that their efforts to isolate Iran had little legitimacy and utterly failed. Iran was successful in doing so, since as many as 120 member states and most of the 21 observers including many of the USA's big allies participated in Tehran Summit.<sup>36</sup> Non-Aligned countries agreed to refrain from endorsing extra-territorial or unilateral economic sanctions that seek to exert pressure on non-aligned countries, threatening their sovereignty and their freedom of trade and investment. Iran was also marginally successful in endorsing its nuclear programme. The Tehran Declaration included provisions that affirmed the inviolability of peaceful nuclear facilities, operational or under construction, from any attack or threat of attack, by identifying such attack as a grave violation of international law, of principles and purposes of the UN Charter, and of regulations of IAEA. The Declaration stressed on the need for a comprehensive

---

<sup>34</sup> Tehran Declaration, *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Greater Kashmir. com, 31 August 2012, available at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Aug/31/nam-summit-opens-in-tehran-57.asp>, accessed on 27 September, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Syed Fattahul Alam, *op. cit.*

multilaterally negotiated legal instrument prohibiting attacks, or threat of attacks on nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Iran's presidency of NAM for the next three years opened up an opportunity for Iran to give more effective voice to its legitimacy over peaceful nuclear rights and to promote support among the NAM members against unilateral sanctions by the USA.<sup>37</sup>

Another vital gain of Iran was the reopening of Iran-Egypt relationship which was closed for more than thirty years since Egypt's recognition of Israel with the Camp David Pact. Though Iran was able to bring Ban Ki Moon and Mohammed Morsi, the first Egyptian president in more than thirty years visited Iran, but Iran's objectives of garnering support for Bashar al Assad regime failed outright. This served as a major blowback for Iran during the Summit. Morsi, called for "solidarity with the struggle of the Syrian people" against what he called Bashar al-Assad's "oppressive regime". Iran was a key supporter of the Syrian government, and Morsi's speech prompted the Syrian delegation to walk out of the meeting in protest.<sup>38</sup> Besides, Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, outlining clearly what was at stake in the Syrian conflict, called on all states to stop supplying weapons to all sides in the Syrian conflict.<sup>39</sup> He also asked Iran to take concrete steps to prove their peaceful purpose of nuclear programme and rejected Iran's criticism of Israel as 'Zionist wolves' and the USA as 'hegemonic meddler'.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4.3. *Western Reactions to the Summit*

The USA and most of its Western allies notably Israel treated NAM with suspicion and opposition. Likewise, they had a halfhearted attitude towards the Summit and tried to make the gains of Iran lighter. The USA and Israel have intensively worked to dissuade the world leaders and politicians and pressured its allies and the UN Secretary General not to attend the Summit, advocating the death and irrelevance of such movement and aggrandising the hosting country over NAM objectives. They ran an all-out media campaign aimed at undermining the largest diplomatic gathering in Iran's contemporary history.<sup>41</sup> Obama administration described Tehran as a 'strange and inappropriate place' for this meeting.

---

<sup>37</sup> Zakir Hussain, "Tehran NAM Summit and Future Arab Politics", *Issue Brief*, Indian Council of World Affairs, 05 October 2012.

<sup>38</sup> "Did the NAM summit backfire on Iran?" *Al Jazeera Inside Story*, 31 August 2012, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2012/08/20128318342480737.html>, accessed on 21 September 2012.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Mahmood Hasan, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Kourosh Ziabari, "The Tehran NAM Summit Undermines US-Israeli War Plans Directed against Iran", *Global Research*, 26 August 2012, available at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-tehran-nam-summit-undermines-us-israeli-war-plans-directed-against-iran/>, accessed on 15 September 2012.

Western mainstream media coverage of the event reflected the intensity of Western powers' fury and disappointment at the successful summit in Tehran.<sup>42</sup> While the British paper *Guardian* called Iran a 'bankrupt' country whose objective for hosting the summit was "to prove a point: sanctions-racked it may be, but isolated it was not," the *New York Times* asked whom the members of this movement were nonaligned with and why Ban Ki-moon was lending his hand to this Iranian whitewashing festival?". The *Nation* (an American newspaper), being even more reactive, called the NAM "useless," saying that "the visit of a few diplomats from Asia, Africa and Latin America will do nothing for the Iranian father who must hold two jobs just to make ends meet - caught between a choking sanctions regime and an economy raven by corruption and mismanagement".<sup>43</sup>

Having deeper security concerns, Israel was much more vocal in resisting against the Summit at Tehran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Ban Ki Moon's visit to Tehran as a "horrible mistake".<sup>44</sup> Netanyahu called the Summit as disgrace to humanity. Israel was very critical to the visit of Palestinian President Abbas to Iran first time since he was elected president of the Palestinian Authority in 2005. Iran, which considered President Abbas as a traitor because of his adherence to 'two-state solution', used to oppose Palestinian Authority and support Hamas. Therefore, Israel raised questions about whether the Palestinian leadership really accepted the legitimacy of Israel.<sup>45</sup> Besides, Canadian government closed its embassy in Tehran, condemning the Summit.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Russia, which enjoyed a 'guest' status in NAM, supported the Summit and sent its Ambassador-at-large Konstantin Shuvalov to the Summit. Russia's President Vladimir Putin expressed warm greetings to NAM members for their participation in the Summit, vowing to step up cooperation with the Movement.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Kouros Ziabari, "Western Media's Angry Reaction to Iran's NAM Summit", *World Press*, 04 September 2012, available at <http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/3934.cfm>, accessed on 17 October 2012.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Ayesha Zuhair, "The non-aligned summit in Tehran", *The Daily Mirror*, 23 August 2012, available at <http://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/172-opinion/21355-the-non-aligned-summit-in-tehran.html>, accessed on 19 October 2012.

<sup>45</sup> "NAM summit in Tehran is a disgrace to humanity", *The Jerusalem Post*, available at <http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=283090>, accessed on 01 October 2012.

<sup>46</sup> "Canada's closure of Tehran embassy, reaction to NAM Summit: Iran MP", *Press TV*, 08 September 2012, available at <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/08/260473/canada-move-reaction-to-nam-summit/>, accessed on 29 October 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Vladimir Radyuhin, "Russia, U.S. send contrasting reactions to NAM summit", *The Hindu*, 30 August 2012, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/article3840313.ece>, accessed on 19 September 2012.

#### **4.4. Political and Strategic Implications**

Unlike the previous post-Cold War Summits, Tehran Summit brought a wide array of political and strategic implications. As the Summit affected some of the key interests of the West in the Middle East, these implications are mostly added as unwanted odds to the basket of Western powers, the countries considered as opposing force against NAM. These odds can be analysed under three broad implications:

##### *4.4.1 NAM as a Counter-balancing Bandwagon*

Tehran Summit brought, at least at a reasonable extent, the perspectives of NAM under the similar context to Cold War, reflecting a different but still opposing image of the Movement to the West dominated international order. While post Cold War NAM shifted its focus to economic development in terms of larger and fair share of least developed countries (LDCs) in the global capital, Tehran Summit has set a different tone reinstating the agenda of national self determination against hegemonic practices and reaffirming commitment to forge a just system of global governance. This development signals the likelihood of NAM's tendency to act as a counter-balancing force against so called 'global hegemony by the few'. NAM, though in a rhetorical exposure, has taken a path from neutrality to opposition. The concern for the West is complicated, furthermore, with the cycle of NAM's leadership in the hands of Iran for next three years and of Venezuela afterward. This factor could give these two countries enough leverage to the re-institutionalisation of anti-Western voice in the global stage. Besides, what can make the USA much worried is that other big powers including China, Russia and India gave moral and political support to the Summit, by being present, ignoring USA's urge to boycott, and supporting many issues of the Summit's agenda. This reflects diminishing 'soft control' of USA in dictating the major international occurrences and questions US' acceptability as global leader.

##### *4.4.2 Dwindling US Policy Options against Iran*

Iranian hosting of the Summit reduced, at a minimum, USA's scope of entertaining the outcomes of sanctions against Iran, oppugning its purported legitimacy. As this Summit broke Tehran's three decades long international isolation and also gave Iran the opportunity to garner support nationally and globally against cascading effects of the policy of 'intimidation' and 'intervention' particularly the infamous 'Iran Threat Reduction Act' 2011, targeting the Central Bank and oil industry, USA could face diminishing efficacy of its unilateral sanctions against Iran.<sup>48</sup> With this, Iran got a chance to diversify the portfolio of its economic relations with NAM members, to reduce its growing

---

<sup>48</sup> Zakir Hussain, *op. cit.*

trust deficit in the Arab world and to utilise many countries' dependence on the Iranian energy supply to make the Western effort futile. Another aspect is that by offering two main arguments for its nuclear programme: (i) nuclear energy to meet rapidly growing domestic energy consumption; and, (ii) nuclear know-how to diagnose and treat 8,50,000 cancer patients, Iran assayed legitimacy of its nuclear programme pointing it as right to peaceful nuclear energy.<sup>49</sup> This can bring down the acceptability of USA's military options against Iran's controversial nuclear programme as the USA has to consider the repercussions before starting any action against the leader of the biggest international assembly after the UN.

#### *4.4.3 Shifts in Middle East's Regional Political Dynamics*

The USA has much to worry about Iran-Egypt relations reopening during the Tehran Summit that has broken the long lasting standstill of three decades and has the possibility of casting a shattering shadow on the USA's Middle East interests particularly her regional dominance and Israel's security concerns. If Morsi sent a positive signal, by sharing the dais with Ahmadinejad and earlier letting Iranian naval ships pass through the Suez Canal for the first time since World War II, a shifting power balance in Middle East strategic theatre could evolve. It represented both the countries' need each other, drawing motivations from the same ideological visions, to share and shape some of the emergent regional and domestic issues and to address common imperatives. Both countries have interests to amplify their support to the Palestinian cause as well as checkmate the strategic weight of Israel and found backing for the right of peaceful nuclear uses by all countries.<sup>50</sup> Though there was disagreement over Syrian crisis due to Egypt's moral stance to support democratic development in the Arab world, the prospective Iran-Egypt tie could carve out 'strategic depth' in Arab world and challenge the so called Riyadh-Doha-Washington axis in the Middle East.

#### **4.5. Role and Implications for Bangladesh**

The principle of non-alignment is a major component of Bangladesh foreign policy. Since the country first joined in Algiers Summit in 1973, Bangladesh has been continuously participating actively in the NAM Summits, promoting policies of international concerns and advocating its support for a just international order where small states could enjoy avenues to raise their voices and uphold their interests. Bangladesh, following its ongoing adherence to non-alignment, played a big role in the NAM Summit held in Tehran. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina attended the Summit and delivered speech at the plenary session

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

on the opening day. Besides, Bangladesh was elected as one of the vice-chairs of the Summit.<sup>51</sup>

Bangladesh's role in the 16<sup>th</sup> NAM Summit involved two broad areas of advocacy and opinion building. The first one was its proposal to promote justice worldwide. In this aspect, Bangladesh put forward three considerations in front of the world leaders:

- 1) The developing world faces injustices arising out of the new geopolitical, socio-economic and climatic challenges more than ever before;
- 2) Injustice is the basic cause of conflicts: absence of democracy, social injustice, poverty, inequality and marginalisation leading to extremism and terrorism within nations, and in relation to others; and
- 3) The decision making process in international bodies serve the interests of the developed few, rather than the vast majority of the developing states.<sup>52</sup>

To address these concerns, Bangladesh urged the necessity of a united, strong and effective NAM to ensure sustainable global peace and security. It also advocated NAM's active role in establishing just world order by reforming the UN and other international organisations with equal voice and representation of developing countries. Bangladesh supported firmly NAM's demand for a sovereign, viable Palestine, claiming the occupation and humiliation of Palestinian people by Israel as blatant injustice that fueled transnational terrorism. Importantly, Bangladesh advanced the idea of strengthening justice in the domestic affairs of NAM countries by adopting 'People's Empowerment and Development Model' mooted by Bangladesh Prime Minister during the 66<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly Session. Bangladesh sought NAM's support in spreading this Model around the non-aligned world.<sup>53</sup>

The second broad area of contribution involved Bangladesh's advocacy for a dynamic NAM with extended mandate. Bangladesh's position was to refocus NAM's mission from decolonisation to contemporary necessity of developing countries including democracy, freedom, human rights, environmental and resource management and so on.<sup>54</sup> Bangladesh demanded NAM to work jointly with the world bodies to deal with climate change, global hunger and poverty, food and water scarcity etc. Besides, Bangladesh emphasised on NAM's initiatives on safe migration and protection of the rights of migrants, as majority of the world's labour migrants are from the NAM countries. The country

---

<sup>51</sup> "PM returns from Tehran", *The Daily Star*, 01 September 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Statement by Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh at The 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, Tehran, The Islamic Republic of Iran, 30 August 2012.

<sup>53</sup> "PM returns from Tehran", *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> Statement by Sheikh Hasina, *op. cit.*



supported NAM's position against terrorism and pledged to extend all cooperation to eliminate it. It also championed the necessity of greater trade and economic cooperation and connectivity among the NAM member states.<sup>55</sup> One significant aspect of a dynamic NAM, as Bangladesh foresaw, would be to act as a complementary body of other international platforms working for legitimate global reforms, rather than being an opposing force to the mighty countries.

The 16<sup>th</sup> NAM Summit has four key implications for Bangladesh: 1) From the strategic perspective, it served as a signal of the continuity of non-aligned nature of Bangladesh foreign policy in relation to big powers with purported geopolitical interests in South Asia. It reflected that Bangladesh attached a big importance to the Middle East and the Muslim countries. 2) Bangladesh's pioneering role in the Summit enhanced its international orientation and its solidarity with Afro-Asian struggle for greater representation in the international forums. It also widened the scope of Bangladesh's leadership of the third world. 3) Bangladesh's image was augmented with its vocal and clear stance for a united and effective NAM with extended mission. 'People's Empowerment and Development Model' in particular provided Bangladesh an opportunity to offer a comprehensive approach to peace and security both nationally and globally. 4) The informal talks with the leaders of countries including India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Iran were instrumental for Bangladesh in terms of promoting cooperation in energy, hydro-power development and resolution of bilateral disputes. However, Bangladesh should not forget that it is a developing country with heavy odds on its shoulder. Both economic dependence on the USA and EU and geopolitical realities do not allow the country to afford an ideal non-aligned orientation in international politics. Bangladesh should act in a balancing manner and take any assertive move towards the non-aligned platform within the acceptable bounds.

### **5. A New Era in the Politics of Non-Alignment?**

While it is premature to score Tehran Summit as the beginning of a new era in the politics of non-alignment, the turnout of 120 member states at the Summit itself is a proof that NAM's relevance is still inviolable. The Summit reiterated the issue that though the context of the Cold War under which NAM came into existence was no-longer present, but small and developing countries were encountering similar concerns including hegemonic practices and interferences of the USA and other rising powers, economic dependence of third world nations on donors' aid and investments, and Western military bloc politics are very much there to adjoin NAM countries in its military involvements and war against extremism and terrorism. The unilateral decision making of the USA along with its allies makes the UN Security Council dysfunctional and, third world countries need a platform to voice their demands and grievances. Besides, the potential of new polarisation in international politics particularly between China and the USA

---

<sup>55</sup> "PM for strong, effective NAM", *The Daily Star*, 30 August 2012.

is reopening the necessity of such a neutral world platform. Though NAM cannot fight the superpowers in terms of military strength, but its importance is rather of moral supremacy and unity.<sup>56</sup> As a collective voice it has potential to build a just international order that can provide developing countries with adequate representation in the world decision making platforms.

On the other hand, the Summit has failed to uphold the collective concerns of developing countries such as environmental vulnerabilities, transnational security concerns, energy crisis, ethno-political and civil conflicts, underdevelopment in financial sectors and growing human insecurities of the third world people. The Summit was a reflection of Middle East political realities particularly Iran-West confrontation over nuclear programme of Iran and the issue of Iranian backings for Syrian regime.<sup>57</sup> The leadership of NAM in the hand of Iran may not uphold, though would increase the functional imperatives of NAM, the crucial necessities of developing countries.

However, 'Non-Alignment' as principle in policy and decision making has enduring significance and will be lasting even if NAM as a movement loses its pace.<sup>58</sup> There are two substantive factors to be prevalent to define the future of NAM. The first one is the extent of NAM's ability to continue its counter-bandwagoning tone and to represent interests of the third world, following an independent discourse and playing a more active role in international politics. Though the number of NAM members is increasing, but this does not translate into the strengthening of NAM's capability at the same scale. The member states lack strong commitment to the ideology of non-alignment and there can be neo-colonialist agenda within NAM, particularly by powerful members including India, Iran and so on. Member states have their own bilateral and multilateral security commitments at many levels and there is much to see how they act in the event of infringing commitments. Besides, member states have divergent preferences in terms of NAM's role and their interests in NAM. For instance, India was playing an act of balancing its national interest between the 'USA and Iran' on one hand and between 'Saudi Arabia and Iran' on the other, being propelled by its need of both Riyadh-Arab League axis and Tehran for energy, remittances and geo-strategic purposes.<sup>59</sup> Importantly, how big powers react to NAM's assertive role is also important in influencing NAM's ability to function effectively in the future. Into this bargain, the gradual turn of international system from unipolarity to the rise of many poles can increase NAM's position if supported by some of these rising poles.

---

<sup>56</sup> Y. Etinger (ed.), *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> Zakir Hussain, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> M. S. Rajan, *op. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> Zakir Hussain, *op. cit.*

The second factor is the interplay between NAM as an alternative platform for cooperation and the emerging associations for regional cooperation. NAM has vast potential if it can extend its mandate in areas of contemporary challenges for its member states including civil unrest, political instability, human security issues, environmental vulnerabilities, economic underdevelopment, and so on. NAM's growing role would help the Movement to avoid a competitive position with the regional blocks such as Commonwealth, Organization of African Union (OAU), EU, ASEAN, and so on and would enable it to rather act as a complementary body.

## 6. Conclusion

There is little disagreement that the Tehran Summit was an important breakthrough in strengthening the commitment of developing countries for a third world solidarity movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the importance of NAM goes beyond Tehran Summit. During the Cold War period, NAM provided a platform for collective self-reliance and integrated fragile nation states into the volatile international order dominated by two major powers.<sup>60</sup> In view of current international system which is dominated by the powerful West, one could argue that NAM's ideals have become even more relevant today than they were at the time it was founded. NAM provides an ideal platform for third world voices to be heard, and a force to counter-balance the West's domination of international affairs. It has the potential to restore the much-desired political, social and economic balance in the international system. For NAM to keep its appeal alive, it needs to adjust its agenda with the changing international conditions. Though not successfully, but the movement itself has undergone certain changes, acknowledging the post Cold War realities, being a platform not just of neutrality but of moral position against unjust practices by big powers.<sup>61</sup> Besides, issues associated with environmental and economic security of developing countries can serve as important factors to ensure the relevance of NAM in the foreseeable future.

---

<sup>60</sup> A. W. Singham and Shirley Hune, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

<sup>61</sup> Ayesha Zuhair, *op. cit.*