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# Reshaping the Non-Aligned Movement: challenges and vision

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## Abstract

With the end of the Cold War, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has lost its relevance and significance. Many believed that the international system was moving towards a permanent unipolar new world order. The last decade, however, witnessed the emergence of new power-centers with the ability to restructure the world into several blocs. Now, some believe in a Second Cold War. Despite these changes, several common challenges faced by societies of the Global South remain and new challenges have emerged. The Global South does not have to reinvent the wheel to effectively deal with the new global realities and challenges. The institutional framework, the NAM is still functioning. It, however, needs to be reshaped and reenergized. This paper is written with secondary data. First, the paper surveys the theoretical and practical problems faced by NAM. Second, it explores the possibility of reshaping and transforming NAM into a robust, unifying institution.

**Keywords:** Non-Aligned Movement, Cold War, International politics, Global south, Asia, Africa

## Background

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is the most prominent international entity of the states of the Third World. Obviously, not aligning with any of the superpower military alliances of the Cold War era was one of the stated objectives of the movement. The Cold War ended and it is argued that with the end of the Cold War, the NAM also lost its relevance. For example, Rauch (2008) recently pointed out that “the end of the Cold War and the resulting rapprochement between the former blocs” have rendered the NAM irrelevant. This article has been written on the premise that the end of the Cold War was only one of the international developments that warranted a reevaluation of the NAM. Perhaps it was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Many of the movement’s objectives lost relevance as major grievances began to be resolved. Therefore, a reevaluation was in order for a long time. This article looks at the current state of the movement against the backdrop of a rapidly changing international order and argues that several of the originally declared objectives of the organization are no longer relevant.

However, the need to continue still remains valid. The movement’s need to continue is justified on the grounds that some of the old issues have taken a new form and new issues that affect members of the NAM as a collective entity, have emerged. Moreover, the international system or, to be precise, the dynamics of the new world order are

constantly changing. This also justifies the need to continue because the system could end up with several rival blocs or power centers in the future. In order to continue and be relevant and efficient, the movement must be revamped and reshaped. This paper argues that reshaping should take three specific forms: (1) symbolic changes, (2) structural changes, and (3) policy changes. This article has been written with the purpose of igniting a public and intellectual debate on the subject of reforming the Non-Aligned Movement. Therefore, no argument has been presented as final thoughts. This paper relies on secondary data for analysis.

### Origin and objectives

Most of the western world, from the inception of the NAM, viewed the organization and its agenda with a sense of suspicion and negativity. The West, not without reasons, believed that the NAM was a pro-Soviet organization and some actors thought it was reactionary. The negativity was also extended to scholarship on this subject. Willetts (1978), in one of his critical analyses of the non-aligned, contended that “while I maintain non-alignment was not born until 1961 as a coherent group of ideas propounded by a group of relatively like-minded states, it has also been maintained by other people that non-alignment did not live beyond 1961” (p. 14). It was in 1961 that the organization, which people in the Third World celebrated as one of their major international achievements, was formed. The argument here is that the spirit of the institution died in the immediate aftermath of its launch. Willetts also did not believe that it was the Bandung Conference that catalyzed the movement. He argued, “One of the more frequent ways in which non-alignment is given *false roots* (emphasis mine) is by referring back to the Asian African Conference, which was held in the Indonesian city of Bandung in 1955” (Willetts 1978, p. 14).

However, many people in the Third World and some political commentators in this part of the world believe that the Bandung Conference paved the way for the NAM. For example, Waters (2001) argued that the “membership and agenda” of the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955, “brought sharply into focus the questions and problems relating to decolonization and the cold war...” (p. 153). In fact, these were the two issues that later defined the non-aligned movement. Alluding to the evolution of the NAM, Rauch (2008) argued that “the first step on the path towards establishing this organization was the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955...” (p. 3).

It is, however, imperative to note that the Bandung Conference primarily was not about non-alignment. The Bandung Principles, which were released at the end of the conference, referred to tenets such as respect for fundamentals of human rights, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Asian and African states, independence, equality, noninterference in internal affairs, peaceful resolution of international conflicts, promotion of mutual interest and cooperation. Naturally, some of these were the primary concerns of the newly independent or decolonized states of the Asian and African regions. However, nobody could argue that the idea of non-alignment was not part of the Bandung spirit. Bandung Principle 6 (a) emphasized the “non-use of collective defense pacts to benefit the specific interests of any of the great powers” (Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India 2012). Therefore, in Bandung, an incipient desire to stay out of the superpower rivalry was expressed. It was the solidarity and the

spirit of cooperation and collaboration that brought the 29 states together in Bandung, that eventually shaped the Non-Aligned Movement. The argument that Bandung was unconnected to the NAM is unfounded. Equally significant is the fact that Yugoslavia under Marshall Tito played a major role in moving the initial solidarity into the Non-Aligned Movement, with relatively clear ideology and purpose.

Twenty-five states attended the first summit in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Positivists thought that the talks that led to the formation of the organization were marked by “belief, confidence and idealism” (Evans 2007, p. 3). The movement had the promise and potential to be the third force in world politics, which hitherto was dominated by colonial states and the new superpowers. The organization, originally, had two primary objectives: (1) non-alignment, and (2) national liberation or decolonization of Third World states. The first two conditions specified for membership were as follows: (1) the country should operate an independent policy based on coexistence of states and non-alignment, or demonstrate a tendency towards implementing such a policy, and (2) the country should permanently support national liberation movements. Describing the primary objectives of the movement, Graham (1980) maintained “the first objective was the formation of a buffer of ‘non-aligned’ states in opposition to external pressure to take sides in the Cold War. The second was the creation of international political leverage to hasten the decolonization process which remained” (p. 153). In line with the anti-colonial and anti-racist ideologies, the organization had specific country related objectives. One of the most prominent was its opposition to the system of apartheid in South Africa. Although not one of the primary objectives, the economic problems of the member states remained a major concern from the inception. A proposal was made in the Belgrade Summit to call for an international conference within the UN framework to discuss economic problems of the Third World states (Chopra 1986). The focus shifted strongly to economic issues in the early 1970s. The NAM summit of 1973 in Algiers resolved to create a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the sixth Summit in Havana renewed the demand for NIEO (Graham 1980). Many of the economic issues of the NAM states, despite the organization’s intervention to remedy them, still remain unresolved (Prashad 2012).

### **End of ideologies?**

Most of the countries that played a pivotal role in the formation of the NAM were former colonies, which gained independence through sustained campaigns against colonial control by the European states. For example, India, Indonesia, and Egypt managed to break out of colonialism after the Second World War. Therefore, they were avowedly anti-colonial and had an interest in freeing the rest of the Third World from colonial rule. Moreover, colonialism was one of the factors that unified most of these states. Meanwhile, despite the general anti-colonial sentiments that were gaining currency internationally in the immediate aftermath of the World War, many states, especially African societies, faced the prospect of perpetual colonialism. It was pointed out that “...the Colonial Office in London still believed that self-government for West Africans was decades away and that the prospect for East and Central African colonies was even more remote” (Babou 2010, p. 46). Therefore, it was natural for a Third World movement

to focus on the problem of colonialism and declare decolonization one of its primary objectives.

However, colonialism did not last forever. By the time the NAM came into force, all of the South Asian states and some of the Middle Eastern colonies were freed from European colonial control. African societies had to struggle hard to earn their freedom. However, they had models and successful cases to inspire them in this struggle. For example, India and Mohandas Gandhi's strategies were adopted in several of the liberation struggles in Africa. Due to the combined effect of these difficulties and the changes that were taking place within the international community especially after the Second World War, many African societies were decolonized or liberated, one by one. For example, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia were decolonized gradually, while Zimbabwe was liberated from the White minority rule in 1980. Decolonization in Southeast Asia was accelerated in the 1960s and 70s. Brunei was one of the last to gain independence in 1984 in this region. The British returned Hong Kong to China in 1997. The remaining territories are not too eager for independence as they are either too small or too poor to seek decolonization (Springhall 2001). Nevertheless, one of the two primary objectives of the NAM was realized as European colonialism eventually came to an end in most of the states. Today, colonialism is not considered an issue in the Third World region.

Freeing South Africa from minority rule and apartheid was another cornerstone of the ideological basis of the NAM. It was pointed out that South Africa "has been at the core of the NAM's efforts to uphold the principles of freedom, justice and quality" (Chhibba 2011). The beginning of the end of apartheid in South Africa started with the ascendancy of F. W. de Klerk, as president of the country. De Klerk removed the ban on the African National Congress (ANC) and released the long imprisoned Nelson Mandela from jail. The negotiations between the de Klerk administration and Mandela led to the gradual dismantling of the minority rule and apartheid. Another basic objective of the NAM was achieved with the election of a new ANC-led government, with Mandela at the helm in April 1994.

As newly independent states, many of the NAM members had to face the challenges posed by superpower rivalry and the Cold War (Jansen 1966). Non-alignment was the policy response to this difficult reality. The Cold War between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, which started immediately after the Second World War, continued with varying degrees of intensity and schemes of expansionist ideology by both superpowers. Most of the Third World countries were affected by this rivalry, as they turned into a target for superpower projects to expand their spheres of influence. According to Freedman (2010), "as both sides searched beyond their core alliances for strategic advantage, the Cold War began to affect the trajectories of states and political movements across the globe" (p. 137). The danger of nuclear war was also looming large in this period. Therefore, many of the Third World states were keen to stay away from the superpower rivalry. This was conceived as crucial for their national interest, independence and survival. As Willetts (1978) pointed out, one of the reasons why the first summit took place in 1961 was the "sudden increase in tension" between the two superpowers in this period (p. 10). The states that came together to form an organization decided not to get involved in the Cold War rivalry and demanded the dissolution of the

Cold War military alliances. It was against this backdrop that non-alignment turned into one of the primary objectives of the organization.

However, the Cold War rivalry was not permanent. Mikhail Gorbachev, the new leader of the Soviet Union, introduced a series of unilateral measures to reduce tension emanating from the Cold War rivalry, especially in the areas of disarmament and arms reduction. Many believe that Gorbachev's actions were influenced by domestic socio-economic compulsions. The reform programs the new leader introduced culminated in the dismantling of the socialist bloc states and eventually the Soviet Union itself bringing the Cold War to an end (Collins 1998).

The end of the Cold War had an inescapable impact on the NAM. As its nomenclature suggested, the existence of the NAM was justified by the Cold War rivalry. Critics contended that without the Cold War, there was no need for the NAM to continue. Justifiably, the relevance of this Third World Movement was questioned. One critic asked whether the movement is a "relic" (Chhibha 2011). Others asked "non-aligned against what?" (Handley 1998, p. 1). Another captioned his analysis, "Farewell Non-Alignment?" (Rauch 2008, p. 3). Critics in the post-Cold War era overwhelmingly used negative terminology to describe the movement. For example, such terms as "anachronistic," "irrelevant," "emasculated," and "substantially redundant" were commonly used (Handley 1998, p. 1). One of the primary arguments that emanate especially from the West is that the movement has no rationality to continue, hence it should be disbanded. A keen observer of the NAM, in 1989, maintained that the organization "now has little or nothing to do with nonalignment as such" (Jansen 1989).

It is true that the end of the Cold War has dealt a major blow to the NAM, but NAM's major problems, for example colonialism and apartheid, were also terminated one by one. Conscious of this fact, the movement was moving goalposts in every major meeting. For example, self-determination for the Palestinians was endorsed later. It is cumbersome to keep track of all the goal statements which were made in the later part of its history. The point is that some of the original goals of the organization have clearly become irrelevant progressively. Unlike many of the Western commentators and political leaders, the Third World leaders do not believe in disbanding the organization just because its original goals have become irrelevant. This is one reason why the NAM summits and ministerial meetings continue unhindered even after the end of the Cold War. However, almost everyone who matters within the organization and in the Third World region agrees that the movement cannot continue in its present form. The consensus is that reform must take place. This paper endorses this view. The NAM must be revamped and reshaped to deliver better results in the future.

### **Justification**

Elsewhere in this paper we have highlighted the fact that there is a school of thought, especially in the Western world, which believes that the Non-Aligned Movement should be discontinued. In order to continue, albeit with a reformed structure and agenda, the movement requires concrete justification. This section explores three major factors that justify the continuation of the movement: (a) there are still unresolved and new issues facing the Third World that require collective action, (b) the member states can promote their national interest through the organization that unifies countries of the Global

South, and (c) the international system is dynamic and constantly changing. Below, we examine these three factors in detail.

### **Unresolved and new issues**

One of the arguments we have made in this paper is that a number of the original objectives of the NAM have been realized. Some of these goals were achieved without any serious contributions from the organization. However, this does not mean that all of its concerns have been addressed. Some old issues still remain, others have taken a new form and shape, and new issues that require collective action of the Third World states have emerged. Examples of these issues abound. Poverty and underdevelopment still remain a major problem in this region. Despite the almost total elimination of colonialism, the essence of colonialism, such as control and hegemony of external forces, continues in different forms. Neo-colonialism has evolved into a major concern of weak societies in this part of the world. Environmental degradation, climate change, disarmament, external debt, state and non-state terrorism, and violence emanating from ethnic and religious conflicts are some of the common issues facing the NAM states today. External actors, including sympathetic states, can hardly resolve these issues for the Third World. In addition, depending on external actors to resolve Third World problems goes against the very essence of independence that the NAM states were seeking relentlessly. These issues may be easily handled and resolved through internal mechanisms and collaboration among the states of the Third World. The NAM could and should continue to focus on these issues.

### **National interest of member states**

The current international system and institutions favor the strong and resourceful states. As Drezner (2007) pointed out, the contemporary global institutions have conferred “untold benefits for the United States” (p. 34). He also highlighted the fact that the European states had been unwilling to reduce their “overrepresentation” in international multilateral institutions (Drezner 2007, p. 34). Since an overwhelming majority of the states in the Third World region are either small or weak, they find it difficult to compete with powerful states, mostly from the Global North. In order to safeguard their independence and protect national interest, they need the assistance of either powerful states or a regional organization. Many of these states are a part of regional organizations. The NAM, in its position as the largest Third World organization, could provide a strong forum to advance their interest.

Despite the problems of the NAM, many states are eager to be a part of the organization because they perceive it as a useful platform and a support system. In the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War, a Western diplomat who was observing the Jakarta summit opined that “a lot of these tiny nations are praying that the (Non-Aligned) movement...can survive and advocate on their behalf” because “most of the nations just aren’t capable of doing it for themselves. No one pays attention to them anymore” (Shenon 1992). This reality has not changed yet. Third World societies are not individualistic; they are collective communities. The leading states in this part of the world have a responsibility to support the small and weak states. If the continuation of the NAM could assist



small states of the Third World to operate independently and with more confidence in the international arena, that itself should be a reason for the NAM to revive and persist.

It is however, erroneous to assume that only the small states that need and could use the NAM as a platform. Upon examining the reasons for South Africa's continuous participation in the NAM, Chhiba (2011) concluded that national interest based assessments is one reason for the country's active participation in the activities of the movement. He further argued:

*The main thrust of SA's foreign policy is the pursuit of its national interests and priorities. Firstly, in the conduct of its international relations, South Africa is committed to garner support for its domestic priorities, to promote the interests of the African Continent, to promote democracy and human rights, uphold justice and international law in relations between nations, seek the peaceful resolution of conflicts; and promote economic development through regional and international co-operation. In pursuit of these principles, the SA Government adheres to and strongly supports a multilateral, rules-based system. If one considers the Principles of the NAM and the priorities and principles of SA's foreign engagements outlined above, there are similarities that cannot be ignored.*

*Secondly, the Strategic Plan for 2011–2014 labels South-South cooperation and multilateralism as fundamental pillars in the realisation of the country's foreign policy priorities. It further directs SA to consolidate relations with the South in order to advance the development agenda. According to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, (DIRCO), the NAM is the "flag ship of the South", and hence it believes that the movement is well-positioned to lead the debate on current challenges. In this regard, NAM serves as both a platform for multilateral engagements and a component of South–South cooperation as it constitutes one of the largest groupings of developing countries. Thus, one could say that SA's membership of the NAM is aligned to its foreign policy priorities (Chhiba 2011).*

South Africa is certainly not a small or weak state. If a powerful country can make use of the organization to promote its national interest, one can imagine the desperate needs of small states. Furthermore, South African reality is not unique. Other major states could also be part of the NAM for the same reason. Therefore, the organization has a purpose to continue, despite the reality that some of the leading NAM states are members of other political and economic entities. For example, South Africa and India are members of what is now popularly called the BRICS, an organization that also include Brazil, Russia, and China. The collaboration of leading NAM states with other major powers has the potential to benefit both the NAM, as a global entity, and these member states.

### **Changing international dynamics**

One of the underlying assumptions of those who advocate the dissolution of the NAM is that the post-Cold War international system will stay static. In other words, they believe that the so-called new world order, created by the dismantling of the Soviet Union, will remain permanent. This is not true. The present system, like the previous ones, is dynamic and evolving. The end of the Cold War led to a unipolar system and many

expected the unipolar international structure to continue in the long run. This vision or reality did not last long as two major trends began to emerge: (1) the United States has been witnessing a decline, and (2) new states emerged with power and capacity to influence the system.

Some believed that the US was in a decline even in the late 1980s (Miller and Yetiv 2001). In the recent past, American decline has been more evident. Its economic growth rate has been stagnating below three percent. This is comparable to what was once called the “Hindu rate of growth.”<sup>1</sup> Unavoidably, the economic troubles of the country are impacting its military capabilities as well. According to Gertz (2014), a security analyst for the *Washington Times*, American military power is diminishing due to the constant budget cuts. Reflecting on this general trend, Admiral Samuel of the US military pointed out that the “historic dominance (of the US)...is diminishing” (Quoted in Gertz 2014, p. 33). A stagnated middle class, increasing national debt, deteriorating working culture and growing public opinion against employing American men and women as foot soldiers, for example, have seriously dented the surviving superpower’s capacity to sustain the status as the undisputed leader of the new world. Some observers argue that what we have today is a “post-American world” (Brooks and Wohlforth 2009, p. 50).

Meanwhile, China and India are emerging with enhanced economic and military capacity. According to one assessment “China and India are emerging as economic and political heavyweights: China holds over a trillion dollars in hard currency reserves, India’s high-tech sector is growing by leaps and bounds, and both countries, already recognized nuclear powers, are developing the blue water navies” (Drezner 2007, p. 34). Drezner (2007), quoting the National Intelligence Council of the United States, also highlighted the potential of these two countries to emerge as the second and fourth economies of the world by 2025. According to the assessment of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, India, China, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, and South Africa will shape the global history in the twenty-first century (Drezner 2007). An overwhelming majority of these states are from the Global South. The point is that the unipolar system has been moving in the direction of a multipolar world. The multipolar international structure could recreate the difficult realities of the past.

There is also the potential for global bloc politics again. The United States still maintains its military alliance, the NATO, which has been expanding with new members. Meanwhile, Russia under the stewardship of Vladimir Putin, through its recent policy decisions, not only has rekindled the memories of the Cold War, but is also striving to build a new coalition. Putin is currently pursuing an idea called the Eurasian Union, which seeks to bring together states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. As a precursor, an agreement for an economic entity called the Eurasian Economic Union was signed in 2014. Currently, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Armenia are members of this organization. The likelihood of a military alliance with the leadership of Russia emerging from this initial union is not completely ruled out by keen observers of global power politics (Newman 2014). Putin is also searching for new allies and alliance partners in Latin America, especially among socialist-leaning states in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> A term used to denote India’s slow growth rate.



China seems to be working closely with Russia in this scheme, as it has become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which consists of Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and China and Russia.

Therefore, one cannot completely rule out the possibility of another round of major-power rivalry and bloc politics. This is certainly one of the possible future scenarios. Such a scenario could force the Third World countries into yet another dilemma similar to what the community of states faced in the 1950s and 60s. If and when the world moves into another phase of bloc politics, the Third World countries may have to decide whether to align, or not, with one or the other centers of power. They cannot and should not try to reinvent the wheel, because the community already has the institutional mechanism to face such a reality. That mechanism is the NAM. This is exactly the primary reason why the organization should be reformed and sustained.

### **Reform**

One of the premises of this paper is that the NAM, in order to be effective and competent, should be reshaped and reformed. A reformation program must be introduced because of the prevailing organizational culture. The conventional wisdom is that the organization is inefficient and does not deliver desirable outcomes. Different member states, supporting or working with one or the other superpower during the Cold War and lack of internal cohesion, are some of the factors that hampered efficacy. Critics point out that the organization is inefficient because it produces only long speeches and documents followed by little or no action. For example, Kochan (1972) maintained that there has been a general feeling within the NAM community that, regardless of the speeches made by leaders of the member states and the summit declarations, “no positive practical action would ensue” (p. 504). This observation was made in the early 1970s. Yet, there is no evidence to argue that this general trend has changed. In fact, it has become more acute. Another observer pointed out that the movement follows what he called “cumbersome and often painful procedures,” leading to inefficiency and clear outcomes to demonstrate (Graham 1980, p. 153). Some believe that it is the unjust international order that is preventing Third World growth. A strong organization that represents the concerns of these states is a must to tackle hostile elements of the present order. The NAM, in order to do this, must be reformed. Therefore, a substantial reform program must be introduced to continue and be effective. In this section we briefly explore the areas which need to be transformed. Three major types of changes are recommended: (a) symbolic changes, (b) structural changes, and (c) policy or agenda changes.

### **Symbolic changes**

Symbolically, the most fundamental element that needs to be changed is the nomenclature of the organization itself. In a way, the name of the organization, the Non-Aligned Movement, is a misnomer. One, as we argued elsewhere in this paper, non-alignment was not the only goal of the NAM; it was formed on diverse objectives. Therefore, defining the nomenclature through one of the objectives was a mistake. It is this mistake that led to the call for dissolution with the end of the Cold War. Proponents of dissolution, not without reason, focus more on the title rather than the essence or the spirit of the organization. Two, in reality, most of the member states were aligned with one or the

other two superpowers. An overwhelming majority of the states were pro-socialist and pro-Soviet, while a small number of states were working closely with the United States. Most of the non-aligned states were not really non-aligned. Continuing with the same nomenclature, therefore, would perpetuate the preset challenges.

Hence, the organization should be renamed taking into account the larger characteristics that unite the member states and the fundamental objectives of the NAM today. Two factors are significant in this regard: (1) roughly defined, all of the NAM states are from the Global South, and (2) there is a sense of solidarity among the member states based on common colonial history and socioeconomic conditions. These two factors may form the basis for the new title of the organization. One of the options is to call it the southern Solidarity Movement (or something of that nature). Non-alignment denotes a sense of negativity as the organization has been defined as something that is not. Southern solidarity, on the other hand, could infuse much needed positivity into the community of states that are involved.

Most of the contemporary leading international and regional organizations are defined by the geographical factor. European Union, African Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organization are some of the prominent examples. The Russian-envisioned supranational organization will be called the Eurasian Union. Therefore, defining the organization through the regional characteristic cannot be such a bad idea. The term Global South does not only denote a region but also a socioeconomic condition. Most of the states of the Global South are economically challenged states. All states of the Global South could be members of the organization, except power-centers such as China. This should not be a problem because China is not a member state currently, but enjoys an observer status. The status quo could continue. The term “solidarity” means that the primary objective of the organization is promoting unity and collaboration among the states of the South. The change of nomenclature, in this manner, will further reinforce the already operating notion of South–South collaboration. Moreover, the solidarity of the Global South could continue unchallenged regardless of the changes that will take place within the international system in the long term.

The term “movement” became part of the nomenclature due to the connections most of the original member states of the NAM had with the ideology of liberation, that is, liberation from colonial control. The original member states seem to have an emotional connection with the term “movement.” If this is the case, the term “movement” should be continued as part of the nomenclature. Some of the Third World organizations have adopted the term “union” taking a cue from the European Union. For example, the Organization of African Unity was recently replaced by African Union. Since different forms of colonialism will continue to be resisted and member states will strive to be independent, borrowing titles from European states should be avoided. Therefore, the term movement will serve the purposes of the revamped organization.

### **Structural change**

Interestingly enough, an organization that has about 120 member states has no permanent secretariat.<sup>2</sup> This factor has been linked to the organization’s weaknesses by many

<sup>2</sup> Currently, the very small G77 secretariat acts informally for the NAM, which is inadequate and justifies the need for fully fledged secretariat.

observers. For example, Kochan (1972) pointed out that “the growing impatience of the more militant nonaligned states with meetings that produce numerous unimplemented resolutions is likely to lead to the demand for a permanent secretariat being met” (p. 506). The idea of a permanent secretariat has been resisted by some of the major states within the organization, for example Yugoslavia, India, Indonesia and Ghana, from the inception. Leaders of these countries feared that such an institution could be costly and could expose internal differences and conflicts. They also probably did not want a small group of countries to hijack the organization. However, it is clear that the absence of a permanent secretariat has contributed largely to the limited success of the organization. Emphasizing the need for a South Secretariat, the South Commission Report argued that the present arrangements of occasional high level political meetings and ad hoc working groups are inadequate to meet the demands and needs of the states of the Global South (The South Commission 1990). This state of affairs has allowed NAM leaders to converge during summit meetings, make grandiose statements, and forget about the whole issue until the next summit.

The fears of a permanent secretariat are baseless. The United Nations with its vastly diverse membership, despite some of the inherent problems, has proved to be useful and is still surviving. In terms of cost, member states are not as poor as they used to be in the 1960s and 70s. As Morphet (2004) pointed out, the Global South “contains rising great powers and major centers of economic growth” (p. 517). Therefore, the organization should be able to sustain an adequately devised permanent secretariat. Differences among member states are not as sharp as they were under the condition of the Cold War. In fact, the contemporary common issues have the potential to forge greater unity among member states. A permanent structure should not cause or create division within the organization. Therefore, the organization should seriously consider setting up a permanent secretariat.

If the decision to set up a permanent secretariat is made, initially, the concept of “rotation” may be followed in terms of the location of the secretariat and the personnel that would serve in such an institution. Ideally, a simple secretariat should be established in one of the original member states from the Asian or African region. The structure could be expanded depending on the needs and availability of resources. A permanent secretariat would immensely enhance the image and capabilities of the organization. Additional institutions, such as an economic development council and an instrument for internal conflict resolution, could be established later due to the significance of these issues.

### **Policy/agenda changes**

Many international actors and commentators believe that some of the policies and agendas of the NAM should be transformed or reoriented (The South Commission 1990). Originally, the NAM was launched as a political entity as global political issues dominated its concerns and agenda. Later in the process, it adopted economic issues as several member states of the organization faced some very serious economic problems such as acute poverty and underdevelopment. Based on the notion that it is the policies and practices of the West that led to the grave economic problems in the Third World region,

the organization demanded a new international economic order. Thus, the organization evolved into a politico-economic institution. This should continue. The reformed and reshaped organization should dedicate equal weight to political and economic issues facing the Global South.

Politically, the notion of non-alignment should be retained, not as the fundamental objective of the movement, but as one of the guiding principles. However, the notion should be redefined and it should be given a clear meaning by the organization itself. This paper argues that the notion of non-alignment is still valid despite the absence of a Cold War. An “alliance” is defined as “a union or association formed for mutual benefit,”<sup>3</sup> or as “a union between people, groups, countries, etc.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, an alliance has the meaning of forming a union or becoming one through an institutional setup. Alliance denotes that the union is not ad hoc or short term; it is a relatively long term commitment. On the other hand, the NAM, as an entity that strives to stay independent, does not want to form a “union” with the present Western alliance or any other future power-centers. In that sense, non-alignment is still a valid notion. The culture, values, concerns, and ways of operation of the Global South are substantially different from the Western world. There is no need to form an alliance with the West. Staying non-aligned with the West makes sense even in the post-Cold War international milieu.

However, the notion of nonalignment should not be defined as not cooperating with the West or other present and future power-centers. The organization cannot aspire or continue to be a group of protesters (Kochan 1972).<sup>5</sup> While promoting solidarity within the Global South, the movement must devise mechanisms to constructively engage the West and other centers of power. One of the means to achieve the objective of constructive engagement is to focus on selective collaboration. The movement should be able to work with major international actors including centers of power on selected issues rather than becoming permanent allies or enemies of one or the other actor. This approach would have the potential to facilitate better outcomes from the perspective of the movement.

Economically, the movement should become more introspective rather than continuing to depend on the West and rich nations for development aid and investment. The need is to devise mechanisms to gain control over natural resources that could be exploited, and promote rich and resourceful nations within the region to invest in the member states of the movement. Most importantly, the organization should seriously consider setting up a bank in line with the ideas of the World Bank or Asian Development Bank. A similar recommendation was made by the South Commission (1990).<sup>6</sup> In essence, the movement should play the capitalist game rather than call for a new international economic order. The NIEO is not a feasible project in the short run. Development from within perhaps is a more useful ideology than a new international economic order.

<sup>3</sup> See, [https://www.google.com/?gws\\_rd=ssl#q=define+alliance+](https://www.google.com/?gws_rd=ssl#q=define+alliance+).

<sup>4</sup> See, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alliance>.

<sup>5</sup> Many view the NAM as a protest movement. For example, Ran Kochan claimed “...the movement as a whole ... can be regarded as no more than a Third World body of protest aimed against big-power monopoly in both the economic and political spheres.” See, Kochan 1972, p. 502.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it could be called the Southern Development Bank.

## Conclusion

The call for the dissolution of the Non-Aligned Movement gained currency with the end of the Cold War. The reality, however, was that some of the principal objectives of the organization became irrelevant even before the Cold War ended. For example, colonization ceased to exist. The end of the Cold War contributed to the perception that the organization has been rendered irrelevant. This paper argues that there is a need for the movement to continue due to the unresolved issues that still haunt the Third World states, the fact that these states still need institutional support to effectively operate within an international order that is dominated by powerful Western interests, and the reality that the international system is evolving and may very well end up in a multipolar world. This paper also argues that, in order to continue and be effective, the organization should be reshaped and reformed.

This paper recommends three primary changes: symbolic changes, structural changes, and policy or agenda changes. Since the nomenclature of “Non-Alignment” is a misnomer, the name of the organization should be changed. One option is to call it the southern Solidarity Movement. Structural changes should focus on setting up a permanent secretariat in one of the original member states from Asia or Africa. In relation to agenda the present political and economic emphasis should continue. Also, the reshaped and reformed organization may retain the notion of non-alignment as one of its guiding principles, but be willing to work with the West and other centers of power on the basis of constructive engagement. Economically, the movement should strive to become independent through mechanisms to promote South–South collaboration and control over natural resources within the region. The rich and resourceful states of the region should be encouraged to invest within the member states. The movement should also consider setting up a southern development bank to promote economic development within the region.

## Abbreviations

NAM: Non-Aligned Movement; ANC: African National Congress; NIEO: New International Economic Order.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that he has no competing interests.

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