

Re-Assessing Nehru's Non-Alignment Policy

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In the present –day international scenario, the role and usefulness of non-alignment in general has become a highly controversial and debatable issue and the movement is passing through a critical phase. It finds itself today at the crossroads and seems to be finding it difficult to understand the path it has to take. It is trying to find its identity reorient its perception and make an effort to determine the role it has to play in the changed context of international relations. This has resulted in a heated debated debate about the validity and contemporary relevance of NAM and non-alignment as foreign policy behavior in this post-cold war “unipolar world” Although Cold War ended long time ago, the realities of current global politics make non-alignment equally relevant today for the developing countries of the world as it was during the Cold War period.

Throughout the Cold war era a few leaders from the developing world, concerned over being drawn into the power struggle between the West(Essentially the US) and the Eastern Bloc(essentially the Soviet Union) called for a movement where countries would not have to be aligned to any of the two power blocks. When Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru became the Vice-President of the Interim Government of India in 1946, the future foreign policy of India began to take shape Although major aspects of India's foreign policy-except perhaps non-alignment which was an off-shoot of the Cold War-was articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru as early as 1927-28.¹ He declared that India will follow an independent policy in sphere of foreign affairs and will work for international co-operation and good will without exploitation of one nation by the other.²

The term “non-alignment” was coined by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in his speech in 1954 in Colombo, Sri Lanka The founding fathers of the movement were; Josip Bros Tito of Yugoslavia, Sukarno of Indonesia, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Jawaharlal Nehru from India. However, Nehru denied being the originator of the policy of non-alignment he played the most important role in its evolution and proliferation³. The fact that Nehru became the undisputed leader of NAM was not only his own achievement but also reflected India's position in Asia⁴. It was largely the product of India's efforts which was aimed at organizing a collective answer to “bloc politics” of the great powers in international affairs.

It also aimed to develop friendly relations among the nations who were struggling to free themselves from colonial domination and to promote peace in the world.⁵ Non –aligned Movement originated from a meeting in 1955 of several Asian and African countries in Bandung, Indonesia . However, it took concrete shape with the holding of its first conference in 1961 that was convened in Belgrade, largely through the initiative of Tito. After returning from Bandung Nehru sent for the U.S Ambassador to say that he was not hostile to U.S.A and that the world could not be divided into communists and non-communists and also there were no clear affirmatives and negatives but shades of opinion.⁶

The policy of Non-alignment meant taking independent decisions on issues of international importance without being tried to any particular country or group of countries. Thus, Nehru and India's subsequent foreign policy has been in favor of peace and disarmament , racial equality and international cooperation for the peaceful resolution of international disputes⁷ Non –alignment ushered a new world order after the Second World War . It was strong standpoint taken against power blocs. NAM was a movement that proved to be safety-valve for the suppressed and subjugated nations. ‘Standing on our feet’ and ‘not being a plaything of others’ was the essence of the policy of non-alignment⁸. AT least two factors were responsible for Nehru's adoption of non-alignment as India's foreign policy Firstly, he was intensely concerned about the opportunity coats of defense spending .Any involvement with the two emerging blocs. he feared, would draw India into struggle and divert critical resources from economic development⁹. Secondly, he was intended on maintaining India's hard-won independence. Moving into the ambit of either superpower could compromise such freedom of maneuver.

There were many doubts about the relevance and future of the NAM after the end of the Cold War However, these doubts were set at rest at the 10th Summit held at Jakarta in 1992 which stressed that the improvements in the international political climate had vindicated the validity and relevance of non-alignment . It reiterated the commitment of the NAM to the shaping of a new international order, free from war , poverty, intolerance and injustice , a world based on the principal of

peaceful co-existence and genuine interdependence, a world which takes into account diversity of social systems and cultures.

Unfortunately today, NAM¹⁰ is at the turning point of survival and relevance. With the end of Cold War, collapse of the Soviet Union, rise of multi-regional organizations and trends towards disarmament it has suffered a major setback. With the disappearance of the bi-polar system followed by uni-polarity and now the proliferation of new power centers, questions are being raised as regards its validity.

There are various reasons which can be attributed for its decline. The statesmen who led this movement had a vision and a foresight but today there is a void of ideologies and beliefs. There is no leadership on global issues the result of which is that it is nearing its rapid fall. Multi polarity has also destroyed its very nature because the nations once committed to it are now repulse from it due to the new found powers NAM today faces tough competition from various organizations like G-77, G-8, ASEAN, SA ARC, BRICK, BIMTEC, Commonwealth and others. These groups are more vocal about the economic issues and issues like terrorism, Child exploitation and gender issues which has led to comparisons which are definitely undermining NAM.

A further criticism has followed NAM which says that India, who has shown the light to this movement, has of late shown a bias towards the Russia. It has failed to observe the principle of neutrality and non-partisan role Thus it is the western powers which criticize it for being a hypocrite and pursuing a policy of double standard¹¹

Though NAM holds that it will not align itself or surrender its foreign policy before any power bloc, yet on the other hand it yearns for recognition from the West Instead of being strong adherents of 'Panchsheel' and 'non-alignment' they are secretly getting favors from the developed countries .Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Somalia are military allies of the USA and countries like Vietnam . Laos Cuba, Ethiopia and Angola get support from the communist camps .Thus , this has led to multi-polarity because now each nation oils with other to get a face- left in its economic and social structure.

Moreover there is practically nothing innovative or fruitful as regards its meetings and conferences. NAM summits are merely a repetition of the resolutions of the UN and its agencies Conferences entail heavy expenditure from 118-ppor developing participating nations . In a way it is a show of extravaganza and wealth with no solution to the urgent problems of the member nations . It is a bitter truth that NAM is no longer a unified forum and its has affected its cohesiveness drastically Critics believe that of the 200 conflicts in the 1970's and 1980's all of them involving third world countries, very few can be attributed to have been incited by super powers.

Thus unless NAM decides to restructure and restructure itself it will continue to be looked upon as opportunistic and unrealistic Till the time NAM realizes the importance of real core issues it will continue to face detractors from all quarters NAM should assume a new role in the international canvas and should make realistic goals as its aims In order foster unity among its member states it should direct its energy on issues which are of greater importance and which have consequences on all member states.

The world has become a unified society where all nations depend on each other for trade and commerce Non-alignment policy which was professed to keep away from power groups during cold war era holds relevance due to economic benefits. It is not just dependence which has made the nations to favor this policy but the question of their very existence in a world where it is actually impossible to exist without others support. Definitely non-alignment has made nations to come up with bold participation in international relations and not continue as helpless spectator.

NAM still holds high symbolic significance. This policy of non-alignment gave the people of India in general a certain role-feeling and a sense of purpose in world affairs.¹²There is no doubt that NAM is also facing challenges while having its own weaknesses. NAM has its own strengths and their importance should not be downplayed. The movement puts the emphasis on the principle of cooperation among nations and continues its support for maintaining peace It encourages disarmament insists on the nations right to self – determination, emphasizes on the need for structural changes in United Nations especially the Security Council, in order to encourage optimal participation of the international community in international processes related to the fate of humanity, insists on the adoption and implementation of multilateral policies as well as focuses strongly on unanimity on issues such as human rights and cultural pluralism.

Thus in summing up we can say that although the cold war has ended there is no end of justice. In fact cold war has assumed as new dimension with the recent emergence of Russia as the world is witnessing the ongoing confrontation between US and Russia over issues like eastward expansion of NATO, Kosovo's independence as well the Georgian crisis. In reality, until the world is not free from war and world peace is not guaranteed, the real development of the Third World

countries will remain only a distant dream. Further as colonialism has been replaced by the phenomenon or neo-colonialism in the form of economic exploitation by the multinational companies (MNCs) because of the process of LPG (liberalization, privatization and globalization) the role of NAM must play the positive role in making the globalization inclusive and must strive to achieve faire just international economic order .

Therefore, Non-alignment has not lost any of its relevance rather it has stood the test of time. It would be severely narrow-minded approach to completely dismiss the political importance of an international congregation of 120 states, a gathering second only to the United Nations in membership. It has served the useful purpose of protecting and preserving the nearest of the third world countries well in the past, so it is also expected to serve their interest well in the future to come. NAM can play the most important role in protecting the economic interest of the Third World countries as well as promoting south –south cooperation.

Thus the philosophy of NAM is as relevant as ever for the Third World. Two-thirds of the countries of the world are today members of the non-aligned movement, it has rightly been described as the world's largest peace movement .That constitutes a fitting tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru's vision and wisdom Thus, the Non-Aligned Movement, faced with , the goals yet to be reached and the many new challenges that are arising , is called upon to maintain a prominent and leading role in the exiting international relations in defense of the interests and priorities of its member states and for achievement of peace and security for mankind .

ENDNOTES

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- [3]. H M Wajid Ali , 2004, India and the Non Aligned Movement , Adam Publishers , India, p.31 .
- [4]. Guy Arnold , 2010, The A to Z of the Non –Aligned Movement and the Third World , Scarecrow Press, p.198.
- [5]. IGNOU Study Material, Independent India towards Development 1947-64. Block VIII , Elective History of India (EHI-01) Modern India (1857-1964) , Unit 40-Foreign Policy of India , p.34.
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- [7]. B.I Grover, A new Look at Modern Indian History (From 1707 to the Modern Times). S Chand & Co, 2010, p.478.
- [8]. Mainstream Weekly , Nehru and Non-alignment Vol XLVII No. 24 May 30,2009,p.15.
- [9]. Stephen P Cohen, 1971, The Indian Army: Its contribution to the Development of a Nation (Berkeley University of California Press),p.55.
- [10]. The 16th NAM summit took place in Tehran, Iran, from 26to 31 August 2012 At the summit, Iran took over from Egypt as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement for the period 2012 to 2015 The 17th Summit of the Non Aligned Movement is scheduled to be held in 2015 at Caracas, Venezuela.
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