

Relevance of Non- Alignment Movement in the 21st Century



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Abstract-The present century traces its path with a multi-polar rules based world order. In such a scenario, Non- Alignment Movement is losing its ground. It is said that the golden age in India's Foreign Policy was in the first 15 years after independence, when NAM (Non – Alignment Movement) provided a constituency for India because of our non-violent victory over the British and the leadership it provided to the newly independent countries. Our problems were different from the small and impoverished nations that thronged the movement, but the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru inspired and provided a vision to them. India tried to solve its problem by inculcating other such countries suffering from same problems as ours and helped them by giving them assistance.

It is said that NAM is losing its relevance as these countries came as a third bloc at international level, along with the capitalist and socialist bloc. However, after the disintegration of USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), there has been a question over the relevance of NAM as an organization. It is argued that the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) was the product of certain circumstances which have undergone a sea change and thus, have become irrelevant.

Keywords –Relevance, Non-Alignment Movement, 21st Century.

The Non Alignment Movement can be considered as a platform for the emerging post-colonial third world countries who were aiming to gain an independent political voice. The phrase Non Alignment was first used by V.K.Krishna Menon at the United Nations General Assembly in 1953. However, in the late 1940s, Nehru had spelt out the strategy behind the phrase, first in Constituent Assembly debates and later in Parliament. In a radio broadcast in 1946, Nehru said, “We shall take full part in international conferences as a free nation with our own policy and not merely as a satellite of another nation.”Nehru proposed that India should avoid entering into “other people’s quarrels”, unless, and this is important and “our interest is involved”. India did not rule out aligning if the need comes. NAM was formed during the Cold War periods when a group of countries came up who were unwilling to join any of the bloc- the American Bloc or the Soviet Bloc, and sought to remain independent or neutral.

The basic concept for the NAM originated in the year 1955 during the Asia-Africa Bandung Conference, in Indonesia. The first conference took place in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961. The founding member countries of NAM comprises of Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Sukarno of Indonesia. However, it is often being argued that NAM was essentially a neutrality movement or to be aloof from international politics, but NAM played one of the most important role in stabilizing world order during the cold war and preserving the peace and security.

The principles of NAM were almost same as that of Panchsheel Principles- respect for principles enshrined in United Nation Charter and International Law, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for political economic, social and cultural diversity of countries and people, defence and promotion of shared interests, justice and cooperation, non interference in internal affairs of state and others. In the views of western scholars, the NAM was an opportunistic and immoral organization (*John Foster Dulles*). According to them the structure of international politics does not provide for exceptionalism like NAM. They also equated the NAM with the Isolationism (Munro Doctrine) and policy of neutrality (policy of indifference – Swiss and Turkmenistan). The USSR was a bitter critic where it gave a very strong argument- Those who are not with us, are against us.

In such circumstances, Nehru clarified, that NAM is not remaining indifferent to all the international activities, rather taking active participation according to the independent decision of the country. He explained that it is independent foreign policy to assert sovereignty.

According to C.Rajamohan, it was not India's idealism but pragmatism to go for it. There was no other choice because there was proximity to USSR; Liberal Constitutional Democracy in India was prevalent during this time and mixed economy of Nehru, left no option for India than taking the Golden Mean.

NAM in the cold war era basically focused on UN Security Council Reforms, was against apartheid, disarmament and focused on solving regional tensions, however NAM failed to deliver its objectives. In the present 21st century, NAM is said to have lost its relevance as bipolar world is non-existent after the disintegration of USSR. It is argued that there has been the end of ideology debate. There has been a shift of global politics narrative from balance of power to economic interdependence. NAM came as a shield against colonialism and imperialism, however, decolonization project has become redundant, as almost all major companies have been decolonized. It has not taken up any initiative regarding global issues like climate issues, terrorism etc. NAM itself has submitted its obedience to developed countries in these issues.

The Emerging Global Order

NAM is said to evolve into NAM 2.0 to become relevant in the present geopolitics and to suit itself to new demands of present world order. The purpose of NAM 2.0 should lay out the opportunities, identify challenges and threats and define the approach that India must take. The world has changed its polarity from unipolarity to bipolarity, where one of the bloc is led by US and the other by China-Russia. The Chinese cartographic expansion in the Indo-Pacific region and the counter balance of US with the QUAD group shows the extent of bipolarity. There has been large scale migration in various parts of the world especially in Europe and Asia due to unstable regimes and conflict between ethnic groups. The extent to which today we are experiencing the global climate change and reoccurring catastrophic disasters is raising the global consensus to come forward and collaborate at an equal footing. Due to protectionism among various countries, rising number of terror activities and nuclearization of Middle East, gives a symbol for the revival of NAM as an organization. This is also realized during recent years that the international bodies like United Nations and formation of multiple regional groupings like SAARC and ASEAN and regional economic groupings like Trans Pacific Partnership and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership which is signifying the evasion of trust from multilateral bodies like World Trade Organization from global politics.

Relevance of NAM

The critics are of the view that the emerging global politics makes the NAM no longer relevant because there is no Cold War now and some members have also lost their interest. There have been disputes among members, withdrawal of one of the founding members; Egypt. It is also said that NAM has failed to achieve its aim of global peace and unity. For the war torn West Asia, NAM was not able to make changes in the situation of West Asia. The reverse wave of democracy hampered NAM's cause of democratization of the global order. Due to economically weaker situation of these countries, the solidarity of NAM was lacking. The NAM was unable to make any formal change in the United Nations Security Council; the organization is not able to push through the agenda. In today's world of globalization and complex interdependence, no country can pursue its interest on its own; the need of the hour is multiple alignments. According to Amb. Prabhat Shukla if we want countries to be on our side in our time of need, we need to assure them of the same from our side. According to Amb. Vivek Katzu, our interests are not entirely in sync with the developing world anymore. While there are some overlaps, but our evolving priorities need to be taken into account. Harsh V. Pant is of the view that NAM needs to pursue new goals, no point in sticking to old shibboleths. G. Parthasarthy opines NAM did not have any binding principle and that it was a marriage of convenience. C. Rajamohan considers it dysfunctional even before the cold war. He

considers it in a state of Comma as the countries were not ready for its burial. They preferred to maintain triennial rituals.

However, according to Shyam Saran, while NAM has lost much relevance for India, non-alignment still governs Indian foreign policy. The Foreign policy has substantive content separated from public posturing. While ethical posturing was public, our focus on relative autonomy was substantive. There has been many question on India's alliance with Russia, however in the view of Shyam Saran, India is just following its national interest. According to Hans J. Morgenthau, every nation seeks power to secure its national interest and India is no exception to it. According to Shashi Tharoor, the world is in like a cold war-like situation with three poles. T.P.Sreenivasan is of the opinion that India is seemingly falling into US camp with Quad and the adverse relations with China is increasing, in such a case, NAM needs to be revived. With 25 states in the beginning, the present membership has extended to 120, the world peace has remained intact and it has not entered into a third world war. It has preserved the territorial integrity and sovereignty of member nations. NAM has remained a protector of small newly independent countries against the western hegemony. These NAM countries have been part of United Nations General Assembly where it represents around two-third membership. . It can act as a bridge between the political and ideological differences existing in the international environment. NAM has been a platform to act as dispute redressal mechanism between developed and developing countries, for ex-WTO. NAM has always supported the concept of sustainable development. It can be used as a platform to discuss global issues, like climate change, terrorism, migration and others. According to M.K.Narayan, it has always been relevant to small states. According to T.P. Sreenivasan the word 'non-alignment' conveyed the wrong notion. But the quintessence of non-alignment was freedom of judgment and action. It should be characterized as 'strategic autonomy'. The whole philosophy of NAM is that it remains united on larger global issues. It is said that NAM has no ideal or ideology as a glue is a wrong assumption. Though the criteria for NAM membership are general, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-racism were essential attributes of NAM countries. The diversity is reflected in both Singapore and Cuba being NAM members. It was through NAM that we operated to counter the efforts to expand the UN Security Council by including just Germany and Japan as permanent members. It also has the facility of members reserving their positions. No NAM country may agree to isolate Pakistan, but the NAM forum will be an effective instrument to project our anti-terrorist sentiments. India could've been used by others for their self-interest by making India as a barrier in case of entry of Pakistan, but it dint happened.

Conclusion- NAM as a concept can never be irrelevant as long as sovereign nation are existing in the global politics. NAM will be relevant as it provides a strong base to foreign policy of its member nations. It can be attributed with the Strategic Autonomy of the member nations as it provides them with the freedom of taking their stand on world politics. NAM can be used to garner support by

South-East Asian countries against Chinese assertion in South China Sea and related island and border disputes. NAM platform for Afro-Asian cooperation and a strong position for poor African nation to have healthy negotiations with China and US. According to Martand Jha, whether Nam is relevant or not depends on the prism through which we are watching, NAM was a policy for- Autonomy, Establishing peace and security and Contain superpower hegemonic aim. NAM was successful in achieving its aim. In the present world order, NAM is more relevant to maintain world peace and enhance the level of growth of developing countries; NAM needs to strive with a better approach. As according to PM Narendra Modi, when nations stand on the side of principles, not behind one power or the other, they gain the respect of the world and voice in international affairs (at Shangri La, 2018).

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