



The End of Non-Alignment?

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By Harsh V Pant

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Abstract: The lack of interest in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) today is symptomatic of the larger demise of the non-alignment as a political ideology in global politics. And India's case is the best exemplar of this global shift. India's rising global profile is reshaping New Delhi's approach to its major partnerships in the changing global order. Though sections of the Indian establishment still remain wedded to non-alignment, New Delhi is showing signs of pursuing strategic autonomy separately from non-alignment under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This separation is overdue in India's foreign policy, and the country stands to benefit from leveraging partnerships rather than shunning them. India today is charting new territory in its foreign policy, predicated on the belief that rather than proclaiming non-alignment as an end in itself, India needs deeper engagement with its friends and partners if it is to develop leverage in its dealings with its adversaries and competitors. Much like India, other countries are recognizing the diminishing returns to being part of the non-alignment movement in an age when the binaries of East and West, North and South are losing salience.

The 56-year-old Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a once powerful bloc of independent nations, is dying and nobody is sending flowers. Interest hit a new low with less than ten heads of states showing up at Venezuela's Margarita Island for the September 2016 summit. The previous summit, held in Iran in 2012, was attended by 35 heads of state from the 120-nation bloc. The rump group appearing in Venezuela included Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, Iran's Hassan Rouhani and Palestine's Mahmoud Abbas along with heads of state of Ecuador and Bolivia, regional allies of Venezuela. The most notable absence was Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose august predecessor Jawaharlal Nehru was the leading light of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The summit was a lackluster affair, with less than half of the delegations attending, partly due to the domestic political troubles of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. Though his country had been on a downward spiral economically, Maduro spent more than \$120 million on the summit, leading his political opponents to suggest that Venezuelans' money was spent for the "government's ego." Maduro was facing isolation in his own backyard, with the Organization of American States

terming his government “repressive and autocratic,” and members of the Southern Common Market, or Mercosur, coming together to oppose Venezuela’s assumption of the group’s presidency. In the midst of his growing regional and global isolation, Maduro sought to use the NAM summit to bolster his domestic legitimacy. Instead, he became the butt of ridicule.



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro

Beyond Venezuela, the growing irrelevance of an ideology that had emerged during the height of the Cold War is a broader issue. Founded in 1961, in now defunct Yugoslavia, the Non-Aligned Movement was an attempt by newly independent nations to preserve their strategic autonomy by not getting entangled in the East-West rivalry shaping global politics. Co-founders were Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno; Egypt’s second president, Gamal Abdel Nasser; Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah; and Yugoslavia’s president, Josip Broz Tito. In theory, this idea was excellent, but in reality, the group soon developed a strong anti-Western orientation and statist economic policies. More often than not, member nations failed to develop an action-oriented agenda. The result was that nations continued to take positions based on their own narrow self-interests rather than supporting other members in their times of need.

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