

# The origins of the Non-Aligned movement in the American independence tradition

by Daniel Snider

In April of 1955, in the cool Indonesian hill city of Bandung, the leaders of 24 nations of Africa and Asia, most of them newly independent from colonial rule, met to confer about the problems of the world and to shape a mutual stand independent of the "great powers" of the post-war order.

President Sukarno, the leader of the Indonesian nationalist struggle against Dutch colonialism and later one of the founders of the Non-Aligned movement along with Tito of Yugoslavia, Nasser of Egypt, Nehru of India, and Nkrumah of Ghana, delivered an opening speech which sounded themes that have persisted throughout the movement's history. He said at one point:

This 20th century has been a period of terrific dynamism. Perhaps the last 50 years have seen more developments and more material progress than the previous five hundred years. Man has learned to control many of the scourges which once threatened him. He has learned to project his voice and his picture across oceans and continents. He has probed deep into the secrets of nature, and learned to make the desert bloom and the plants of the earth increase their bounty. He has learned how to release immense forces locked in the smallest particles of matter. . . .

But has man's political skill marched hand in hand with his technical and scientific skill?

Perhaps now more than at any other moment in the history of the world, society, government, and statesmanship need to be based upon the highest code of morality and ethics. And in political terms, what is the highest code of morality? It is the subordination of everything to the well-being of mankind. But today we are faced with a situation where the well-being of mankind is not always the primary consideration. Many who are in places of high power think, rather, of controlling the world.

Yes, we are living in a world of fear. The life of man today is corroded and made bitter by fear. Fear of the future, fear of the hydrogen bomb, fear of ideologies. Perhaps this fear is a greater danger than

the danger itself, because it is fear which drives men to act foolishly, to act thoughtlessly, to act dangerously.

In your deliberations, sisters and brothers, I beg of you, do not be guided by these fears, because fear is an acid which etches man's actions into curious patterns. Be guided by hopes and determination, be guided by ideals, and yes, be guided by dreams.

Today, almost 30 years later, the world is still a world of immense possibilities for progress defined by the capabilities of science and technology. But it is also a world dominated by the fear of war, controlled by men "in places of high power" who are determined to maintain their ascendancy over "lesser races." And it is a world which more than ever demands determined statesmanship guided by morality.

The Non-Aligned movement came into being in opposition to the order that emerged out of World War II, to the twin pillars of that order—the anti-growth Bretton Woods monetary and financial system, and the strategic division between West and East.

The founders and leaders of the Non-Aligned were the products of the struggle against colonial rule and imperialism. They sought to assert their independence and their national sovereignty not only in the political sphere but also in the effort to achieve economic growth. The Bretton Woods system and the Cold War were the obstacles to that effort. The first sought to maintain the essence of imperial rule in the form of economic neo-colonialism, and the second sought to pre-empt efforts for development by making the developing countries the "hot" battleground of limited wars fought under the strategic nuclear doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction which dictated that no direct confrontation between the two superpowers take place.

The failure of the United States to realize the promise of President Roosevelt's intention to create a post-war order based on the destruction of British colonialism, and the success of Winston Churchill in creating the Cold War confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, were impetus for "non-alignment." Through the creation of a

broad political association among themselves, the emergent nations sought to act with cohesion and the political power to escape from this Churchillian-Bretton Woods order. Organizing the Non-Aligned as a political movement with these broad goals was a limited success which at the least defined the *possibility* of true national sovereignty and rapid world economic development.

Today, the defense of a global financial hierarchy that is for all purposes dead continues. Cold War confrontation continues to presage World War III, and "limited wars" still constantly savage the efforts for development.

The Non-Aligned movement remains what it has been all along—a political force of tremendous potential authority which has yet to act decisively to realize its goals. The aim of this brief historical review is twofold: to reeducate ourselves on the circumstances and purposes that necessitated the creation of the Non-Aligned movement, which remain totally relevant at this moment; and to pose clearly in historical perspective the tasks which face the Non-Aligned movement at this crucial moment in history.

### **Nehru: the father of non-alignment**

The intellectual and political father of the Non-Aligned movement is Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India and the leader of its fight for freedom. It was Nehru, right after India's achievement of freedom from British imperialism in 1947, who first articulated the concept of non-alignment as the foundation of India's foreign policy. India, one of the first nations to win independence after the war, was well suited to take this path—it was a great nation, too large and too potentially powerful to be easily pushed around, and a nation blessed with the leadership of statesmen like Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi.

In his speeches, Nehru at that time often replying to domestic as well as foreign critics, rejected the charge that non-alignment was "neutralism," a passive stance of avoiding conflict. The policy from the beginning was to politically organize the newly independent nations to act to intervene in the crises facing the world, though never as a "third bloc," since they opposed the very concept of blocs.

The first step was taken before India's full independence, during March 1947. The constituent government organized in Delhi an Asian Relations Conference bringing together representatives from Egypt, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Turkey, Korea, Iran, Thailand, Malaya, Afghanistan, Burma, the Soviet Republics of Asia, and other countries. In his inaugural speech Nehru defined his goals to the delegates from Asia:

Ever since news of this conference went abroad, some people in Europe and America have viewed it with doubt, imagining that this was some kind of Pan-Asian movement directed against Europe or America. We have no designs against anybody; ours is the great design of promoting peace and progress all over the

world. Far too long have we of Asia been petitioners in Western courts and chancelleries. . . . We do not intend to be the playthings of others.

### **Economic progress the essence of peace**

In that speech, Nehru touched upon the link between economic progress, war-avoidance, and the need to end the old order of colonialism. He said, "Peace can only come when nations are free, and also when human beings everywhere have freedom and security and opportunity. Peace and freedom, therefore, have to be considered both in their political and economic aspects. The countries of Asia, we must remember, are very backward, and the standards of life are appallingly low. These economic problems demand urgent solution, or else crisis and disaster may overwhelm us."

The eradication of the legacy of British colonialism and post-war neo-colonialism, Nehru insisted, required a new relationship between the underdeveloped countries and the advanced countries, with a commitment to the industrial modernization of the former; and, at an early point, this concept became central to the Non-Aligned movement. In June 1948, on the theme "Economic Freedom for Asia," Nehru addressed a conference of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East held in India. There he attacked the idea that the economic development of one part of the world can be isolated from any other. He told the conference:

Today if one part of the world goes down economically, it has a tendency to drag others with it, just as when, unfortunately, war breaks out, other people who do not want war are involved. . . . It is not a question of the prosperous, merely out of the generosity of their hearts, helping those who are not prosperous though generosity is a good thing. But it is a question of enlightened self-interest, realizing that if some parts of the world do not progress, remain backward, they have an adverse effect on the whole economy of the world and they tend to drag down those parts that are at present prosperous. Therefore it becomes inevitable to consider these problems in the global way and to pay even more attention to those parts which are relatively backward.

Nehru told the conference that though the Asian nations wanted help for their industrialization, "No Asian countries will welcome any such assistance if there are conditions attached to it which lead to any kind of economic domination." What they wanted, he said, was development: "the whole of this Asian region is full of vast resources, human and material, and the question before us is how to yoke them together and produce results. It is not that we are lacking in men or material. We have both. In order to yoke them together, the easiest way is to have certain assistance in capital equipment and experienced technical personnel from those countries which may have a surplus. From the

# The membership of the Non-Aligned movement

The following is a list of all member nations of the Non-Aligned movement, and all nations that are designated "observers" at the Non-Aligned summit. While not a member of the movement, an

observer is allowed to participate in all the sessions of the conference, including committee meetings, and place its views on the record.

## Non-Aligned Member Nations:

Afghanistan	Equatorial Guinea	Malawi	Seychelles
Algeria	Ethiopia	Malaysia	Sierra Leone
Angola	Gabon	Maldives	Singapore
Argentina	Gambia	Mali	Somalia
Bahrain	Ghana	Malta	SWAPO
Bangladesh	Grenada	Mauritania	Sri Lanka
Belize	Guinea	Mauritius	Sudan
Benin	Guinea-Bissau	Morocco	Suriname
Bhutan	Guyana	Mozambique	Swaziland
Bolivia	India	Nepal	Syria
Botswana	Indonesia	Nicaragua	Togo
Burundi	Iran	Niger	Tunisia
Cape Verdi	Iraq	Nigeria	Trinidad and Tobago
Central African Republic	Ivory Coast	Oman	Uganda
Chad	Jamaica	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates (UAE)
Comoros	Jordan	PLO	United Cameroon
Congo	Kenya	Panama	United Tanzania
Cuba	Kuwait	Peru	Upper Volta
Cyprus	Lao People's Democratic Rep.	Qatar	Vietnam
Democratic Korea	Lebanon	Rwanda	Yemen Arab Republic
Democratic Yemen	Lesotho	Saint Lucia	Yugoslavia
Djibouti	Liberia	Soa Tome and Principe	Zaire
Ecuador	Libya	Saudi Arabia	Zambia
Egypt	Madagascar	Senegal	Zimbabwe

## Observers:

African National Congress (ANC)	Dominica	Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC)
Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO)	El Salvador	Philippines
Barbados	Islamic Conference	Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP)
Brazil	League of Arab States	United Nations (UN)
Colombia	Mexico	Uruguay
Costa Rica	Organization of African Unity (OAU)	Venezuela

world's point of view that will inevitably lead to the world's good." Nehru called for the development of electric power, including vast river development projects like the Tennessee Valley effort in the United States as the basis for industrialization and increased food production.

Nehru went on to note that many people were saying that "we cannot solve any problem until the Indian [population] problem is checked or decimated. I entirely disagree with that. I think India is an underpopulated country. . . . It is underpopulated because large tracts of India are still unpopulated. . . . If we increase our production, agricultural and other, and if the population is put to work for production, then we are not overpopulated. We have these big river valley schemes which, in addition to irrigating land, preventing floods, soil erosion, and malaria, will produce a very great deal of hydro-electric power, and at the same time we will have industrial development."

The embroilment of the world in the "great divide" of strategic confrontation between the West and the Soviet bloc took on dangerous forms with the advent of the Korean War in 1950 and the expansion of the French colonial war in Indochina during the same period. The Cold War was being fought out with devastating methods on the territories of the developing countries, precisely as the Churchillian strategists in London and Washington intended.

Nehru and others rejected these pressures. In April of 1954, a conference of five prime ministers was held in Colombo, Ceylon involving Ceylon, Pakistan, India, Burma, and Indonesia. Two days earlier, the Geneva conference on Indochina had opened—the conference which was to formally end French rule in Indochina; that question was high on the Colombo agenda, along with a proposal by Indonesia to convene a deliberative session of African and Asian leaders in the near future.

Nehru's resistance to Cold War politics was also expressed in the 1954 "Five Principles" or *Panchsheel*, which first made their appearance in the preamble of an agreement on Tibet between India and China. Those principles, later embodied in the Bandung declaration and other Non-Aligned documents, were mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence.

In December 1954, the five Colombo prime ministers met in Bogor in Indonesia and decided to hold the Afro-Asian conference in April in Bandung. The invitations were sent out to all independent nations on both continents, including those who were part of military alliance pacts. The pre-meeting at Bogor and the Bandung conference itself was threatened many times by disputes between Western-allied and Soviet-allied countries. The successful convening and conclusion of the conference was therefore itself a victory over the attempts to prevent the emergence of a political voice for the Afro-Asian nations. The participants included nations as divergent as communist China, Japan, Egypt, India, Ethiopia, North and South Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, and others.

### **The Bandung declaration**

The Bandung conference and its final communiqué expressed again the hopes for economic progress which had been so fresh in the 1940s, along with a strong condemnation of colonialism, still dominant in Africa, and the views of the Afro-Asian nations on "World Peace and Cooperation." The crucial issue of non-alignment in the sense of non-participation in any of the great-power-sponsored military pacts was left unsolved at Bandung, due to the disputes among nations already involved in such pacts.

Economic cooperation was the leading item of the final declaration. The conference "recognized the urgency of promoting economic development in the Asian-African region" while calling also for "economic cooperation" among the participating countries on the basis of mutual interest and respect for national sovereignty.

The idea of mutual cooperation—now known in Non-Aligned parlance as "South-South cooperation"—was concretized in calls for mutual assistance in technical training, scientific education, and establishment of multilateral trade and payments arrangements. The conference also called for "the establishment of national and regional banks and insurance companies."

The Bandung declaration, responding to President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" proposal in part, called for rapid development of nuclear energy. They said: "The Asian-African Conference emphasized the particular significance of the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes for the Asian-African countries." They welcomed the Eisenhower offer of cooperation in information and training in this area.

These calls for economic cooperation were coupled with a call for the mutual enrichment of cultures of Asia and Africa. This included the provision of training at educational, scientific, and technical institutes, already existent in some countries such as India, for students from Asian and African countries where such facilities did not yet exist.

The Bandung conference concluded with a Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation which expressed in somewhat idealistic terms the necessity for peace. It "viewed with deep concern the present state of international tension with its danger of an atomic world war," calling for "the reduction of armaments and the elimination of nuclear weapons" so that "international peace can be promoted and nuclear energy may be used exclusively for peaceful purposes."

### **The generation of leadership**

What ultimately made Bandung work, and was responsible for the actual founding of the Non-Aligned movement as a formal organized force six years later, was the quality of political leadership provided by a handful of statesmen. The old guard of the Non-Aligned movement consisted of five men—Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Ahmed Sukarno of Indonesia, and Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia.

The first four of these men were the finest of a generation of political leadership which had led their nations' wars for independence from colonialism, and had become the heads of governments committed to a process of economic development and nation-building. Sukarno and Nehru traced the political history back to the early days of the century. By the 1920s, each headed their respective freedom movements, sharing the experience of jail and long political struggle. Nkrumah had led the first successful African independence fight in Ghana; he was recognized as the premier statesman of Africa. Nasser, who came to power following the 1952 "officers' revolution" against the British puppet monarchy in Egypt, was a man who also saw his leadership role beyond the bounds of his own nation.

The intellectual and political bonds between these men became close during the 1950s. Sukarno and Nehru had known each other before that time. The Indonesian and Indian nations had a link going back 1,500 years. Nehru was also the intellectual guide for Nasser and Nkrumah. Nasser first met Nehru in Cairo in June 1953. In one of his writings he recalled a five-hour talk with Nehru, on a ship steaming down the Nile River, about the importance of economic planning, when Nehru began to teach Nasser the lessons India had already learned. Nasser recalled the emphasis Nehru placed on the training of human beings as the key to development, a lesson he said he never forgot.

Nasser stopped in India on his way to the Bandung conference. He recalled his visit: "My visit to India proved a turning point in my political understanding. I learned and

realized that the only wise policy for us would be of positive neutrality and non-alignment. Coming back home, I found out from the response it had evoked that is the only possible policy which could get the broadest possible support from the Arab people." Bandung was Nasser's first real venture into international politics; Nehru later remarked that "his role was perhaps the most remarkable and definitely the most valuable from our point of view."

The role of Yugoslavia's Tito and his link to the developing countries first emerged in the mid-1950s. From Dec. 1, 1954 to Feb. 5, 1955, Tito made an exceptional tour which included a three-week stay in India and a first-time meeting with Nasser. A close link apparently developed between Tito, Nehru, and Nasser. Constant consultation ensued on all sorts of issues among the three. In July 1956, great attention was focused on a summit meeting the three held in Brione, Yugoslavia with accusations flying in the world press that they were plotting to form a "third bloc."

The free nations of Asia and Africa were asked to make their choice—they or us. As the late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was to remark later (in June of 1956), attacking the very concept of non-alignment, it is an idea which "pretends that a nation can best gain safety for itself by being indifferent to the fate of others. This has increasingly become an obsolete conception, and, except under exceptional circumstances, it is an immoral and shortsighted conception."

The compulsions which brought Tito and Yugoslavia to the policy of non-alignment were not the same as for the developing countries who came out of the struggle against colonialism. It was not economic development that was at the forefront of Tito's concerns but the fear of war and of being caught between the confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Yugoslavia's dramatic break with the Soviets under Tito, the tightrope act of Yugoslav foreign policy, and the fear that any confrontation in Europe would mean the destruction of Yugoslavia as a nation were all elements in promoting non-alignment.

The Yugoslavs, isolated from both the Western and Soviet alliances, sought political alliances with the Non-Aligned developing countries as a matter of sheer geopolitical necessity.

The other crucial factor in bringing the Non-aligned movement formally into being at Belgrade in 1961 was the dangerous events of 1960-61. U.S.-Soviet tensions were one part of this—the cancellation of the May 1960 Paris summit between Eisenhower, Khrushchev, and the French and British after the U-2 incident, and the rising tensions over Berlin in the months that followed. This was followed in 1961 by the clash of Kennedy and Khrushchev at the Vienna summit and the Berlin crisis of the summer-fall which made many in the world feel that they were at the brink of war.

This escalation of the Cold War extended to the developing sector. In 1960, sixteen African countries became independent; but this was overshadowed by the Congo crisis

which began in the summer when U.N. troops intervened, denounced by the Soviets, and then Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba was murdered. April 1961 was the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. The crisis in Laos and the U.S. intervention into Vietnam mounted.

### **The Belgrade summit meeting**

The September 1960 session of the United Nations General Assembly brought about the first "pre-meeting" of the Non-Aligned movement, a meeting in New York in September of the five leaders. The session was dominated by U.S.-Soviet tensions—it was the time of Khrushchev's shoe-pounding General Assembly speech—and the Congo crisis.

The five leaders jointly sponsored a simple resolution before the General Assembly calling for the American President and the Soviet chairman "to renew their contacts interrupted recently." The resolution was emasculated due to "Western obstruction" and lack of Soviet support. In disgust Nehru withdrew it.

The moral impetus of Bandung had by this point been smashed against the rocks of Cold War politics. As Nehru reflected in his U.N. speech, there could be no thought of development without securing "peace." But as became equally clear, a simplistic desire for disarmament and "peaceful co-existence" in the absence of real conditions which could prevent war—more than anything else, the process of economic growth and modernization—is largely impotent.

Nehru joined with Tito, Nasser, Nkrumah, and Sukarno in sponsoring the first Non-Aligned summit in Belgrade in September 1961. The Cairo pre-meeting had defined certain criteria of non-alignment, mainly rejection of membership in the military pacts sponsored by the great powers, but in the end, the disputes were resolved in favor of a somewhat limited group of countries, 25 in all, with three observers. The Asian members were Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. From Africa there were Algeria, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia. The other members were Cyprus, Yugoslavia, and Cuba; Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador attended as observers.

Attention was focused far more on this situation, along with the issue of de-colonization, than on the issues of economic development.

Nehru, a reluctant attendee, intervened in an effort to focus on the need for action, not resolutions, to avert war. His speech reflected both his irritation with empty politicizing and his own sense of being overwhelmed by the escalation of the Cold War. He concluded:

Let us look at this world today. It is a strange world, perhaps the most fundamental fact of the world being the coming out of these new mighty forces. I am referring to atomic energy, space travel, and all that, which is the basic factor of the modern world. We have to think in terms of that, and not get lost in the

terms of a world which is past and in slogans that no longer apply . . . . When power of a new kind comes, all your imperialism and all your old-style colonialism will vanish and will go, I have no doubt. . . . We cannot afford to be backward, therefore we have to build in our own countries societies of free men, societies where freedom is real—prosperous societies where the standards of living are rising. . . . These are for us the essential, basic problems to be thought out in terms of today, in terms of the modern world, space travel, jet travel, atomic energy, not in terms of long ago. . . .

If we cannot prevent war then for the moment all our other problems are sunk, we cannot deal with them. But if we can prevent war we can go ahead on our other problems, help to liberate parts of the world under colonial and other imperial rule, and more especially build up our own free societies . . . because that is our positive work. Merely getting angry with some other country achieves nothing. . . . It is the positive constructive work we do that gives us strength to make our countries free. . . . But we cannot do any of this unless there is no war.

The Belgrade meeting issued a special “statement on the danger of war and an appeal for peace” which was particularly addressed to President Kennedy and Soviet Chairman Khrushchev. The appeal, referring to “the imminent conflict” and “recent war preparations” called for the two powers “to make the most immediate and direct approaches to each other” to avert war.

On the economic side, one concrete proposal was for the convening of an international conference to reach agreement on means to solve common economic problems. In July of the following year, on the initiative of Tito and Nasser, again supported by Nehru, an economic conference was held in Cairo. Thirty-one nations attended, most of them from the Non-Aligned movement, with the addition of Ibero-American countries including Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela. There were few new ideas. The one clear result of the meeting was a call to hold a United Nations conference on trade and development, which took place in Geneva finally in 1964 (the first UNCTAD). The Cairo meeting is credited with the formation of the Group of 77, the formation of developing countries which has since been a major institutional factor, alongside the Non-Aligned, in the effort to create a New World Economic Order.

### **The Cairo summit of 1964**

The next summit meeting of the Non-Aligned nations took place in Cairo in October 1964. The Cairo summit represented an expansion of the movement to 47 full members and 10 observers (mostly from Latin America); it was

also marked by the tendency to draw lines within the Non-Aligned between “radicals” and “moderates.”

Radicalism was characterized by a strong emphasis on “anti-colonialism” and “anti-imperialism,” which were given first place in the final Cairo conference declaration. The African countries, for whom colonialism was still very much a live issue, were now numerically dominant at the Cairo summit and the Asian nations, particularly India, were considered “moderates.”

The key to Cairo, however, was that it represented the end of the era of Non-Aligned leadership represented by the Big Five. It was Nehru—he had died earlier that year—who was most sorely missed at Cairo. Nasser, Nkrumah, and Sukarno were under severe political destabilization and attack, facing the pressures of the IMF in Ghana and Indonesia and the pressures in the Mideast which led Nasser to the disaster of the 1967 war with Israel. In 1965 Sukarno was overthrown by a military coup; in 1966 Nkrumah was overthrown; and by 1967 Nasser was politically finished, dying a broken man in 1970.

The Non-aligned were hit hard during this period of the 1960s. The first blow came in 1962 with the Chinese invasion of India—not only a military defeat for India but a defeat for Nehru’s hope, embodied in the Panchsheel principles, that within Asia the spirit of Bandung would prevail. The reaction of the Non-Aligned was hardly inspiring—only Egypt and Nasser effectively came to the defense of India against Chinese aggression. An emergency meeting of Non-Aligned countries in Colombo in December 1962 to attempt a mediation of the conflict was emasculated by the pro-Peking leanings of Sukarno’s Indonesia and Burma, and the ability of the Chinese to manipulate others, including African leaders.

The emergence of divisions, first of the Cold War variety and then those created by Peking’s Maoist extremist crusade against the Soviet Union, was debilitating to the Non-Aligned movement. The Indonesians, acting on behalf of Peking (against India in part) and of Sukarno’s egoism, pushed for a second Afro-Asian Bandung rather than a second Non-Aligned meeting after Belgrade. A second Bandung would include China while the latter would not. Chou En-lai’s late 1963-early 1964 grand tour of Africa was intended, while waving a flag of revolutionary “anti-imperialist” radicalism, to mobilize support for a second Bandung. Preparations were actively underway in 1964 and a race between a Non-Aligned and Afro-Asian summit was on—the former won, due to the Indian and Egyptian strong opposition to the Chinese plans.

It was not until 1970 in Lusaka that a third summit meeting could be held. Cairo was the end of one phase. The revival of the Non-Aligned movement in 1970 was marked by the return in the context of the international monetary crisis, and by an emphasis on the need to change the global economic order, while building the Non-Aligned as a cohesive movement opposed to Cold War strategies and wars fought in the developing sector.