Impact of Nonaligned on Change in International Organizations*

C S R Murthy
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (India)

Abstract: Although major intergovernmental organizations (IOs) owe their origins to the West, they owe their continuing relevance to the non-Western (non-aligned) countries. There are both positive and not so positive dimensions of the impact of the non-aligned countries on IOs. Their dogged pursuit of universality of membership transformed the originally aligned UN to an unaligned organization. Not only in influencing UN to reorient its agenda in favour of anti-colonialism and anti-racism, but also in the acknowledgement of peacekeeping as the unique contribution to world peace and security, the role of non-aligned is notable. Emanation of IDA, UNCTAD, and UNIDO exemplifies the institutionalization of aspirations for economic development of Global South. The Fund/Bank reworked their lending policies in response to the criticism about their indifference to the hardships of the poor countries. True, group solidarity governed their interface with IOs; but divergence between individual and group interests - whether on trade, environment or disarmament issues - was not uncommon. The powerful West sought to gain both by exploiting such intra-group contradictions and to undermine inconvenient IOs. Indeed, the lately evident non-aligned solidarity shortfall may impinge on the legitimacy of normative framework evolved by IOs.

Though the non-aligned movement may not qualify to be an international organization for the chief reason that it does not have a permanent secretariat, there can be no two opinions about the contribution non-alignment has made both as a set of principles and as effective foreign policy strategy of more than one hundred countries to various international organizations especially the United Nations right from the 1950s. The nonaligned countries have enthusiastically rededicated themselves to the relevance of the United Nations and other international organizations. This historical fact is worth analysing despite the relative decline of nonalignment. In a way the decline in the collective political influence of non-aligned countries is widely acknowledged after the collapse of bipolarity and the doubts cast over the multi-polar nature of world politics. Indeed, to the extent the non-aligned countries have made an issue of multilateralism a rallying point in defining their contemporary agenda, international organizations do play a vital role in supporting their individual and collective aspirations, apart from expecting to rely on those countries’ goodwill in enhancing their power and legitimacy in collectively managing common problems.

If the twentieth century has to be considered as the era of international organizations, the credit should go to in no small way to the non-aligned countries, which have taken extraordinary interest in ____________

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Strengthening the institutional framework of international system wedded to the values of freedom, peace, progress and justice. Javier Perez de Cuellar applauded the decision of NAM to observe ‘Year of the United Nations by referring to the long-held view of the nonaligned countries that ‘nothing could better accommodate the world’s diversity and assure both the stability and dynamism of a peaceful world order than
a return to the basis of international relations laid down in the Charter of the United Nations’. 1 Naturally, the relationship between the non-aligned and the international organizations has remained intimate. In fact, international organizations provide important lenses to the world view of non-aligned countries, just as international organizations have found the non-aligned as a natural ally in reinventing their missions and continuing relevance in the changing international settings over time.

From the non-aligned perspective international organizations are a great levellers of the international system which is long identified with the logic of material power; and although they are inherently the instruments created by major powers to maintain order by laying down and applying rules, the non-aligned have looked at IOs as centres of ‘normative power’ projecting rules of conduct and principles of accountability applicable to states across the board.2

The present paper adopts the constructive approach to international relations in analysing the role of nonaligned countries in influencing the international system through an inter-subjective process helped by international organizations while highlighting the significance of changing norms, identities and interests (Barnett and Finnemore 2007: 41-57).

The present paper will focus on certain aspects of the nonaligned impact on the United Nations and other IOs – especially with reference to the identities newly assumed, the norms piloted or refined, the redefined policy priorities, structural reform issues.

Institutional Changes

Among the foremost impacts is the transformation a number of IOs have undergone in their identities. The experience of the United Nations is a case in point. In a generation’s time, its membership originally intended for those aligned in the War had witnessed three-fold increase bringing the newly independent nonaligned countries from Africa and Asia leading to a remarkably qualitative redefinition of its identity as a ‘nonaligned organization’ (Rajan 1987: 295-299). The UN as a path breaker among the universal institutions owes it to the role played by the non-aligned. When the UN was created, it was not intended to be either a universal or unaligned institution. The non-aligned have constantly pressed to right from the early years for universal membership – whether it was Communist China’s representation, or admission of former enemy countries and so forth. Thanks to the non-aligned, the UN asserted its autonomy by freeing itself from the political attachments. And it became unaligned, in so far as the ideological identification went. The non-aligned successfully made it their mission to make the UN unattached to any power blocs. That is why, when attacked by the Soviet communist leadership in the thick of the Congo politics in 1960 Dag Hammarskjold made the non-aligned his political constituency and asserted that: “It is not ... the big Powers who need the United Nations for their protection, it is all the others. In this sense, the Organization is first of all their Organization and I deeply believe in the wisdom with which they will be able to use it or guide it.”3 He announced his intention to continue to serve newly independent (nonaligned) countries as long as they wished him to.

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1 Foreword to Rajan (1987: vi).
2 Kim (1987:12) conceives normative power as the ‘ability to define, control, and transform the agenda of international politics and to legitimate another world view or vision as the dominant political paradigm’.
The non-aligned struggle to make the UN universal has inspired other organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), or the UNESCO – whose membership was far lesser than that of the UN - to become universal. Now all of them are comparable to the universal orientation of the UN. The battle for universalising the membership of UN and other IOs was not easy. During the cold war era, the entire burden fell on the shoulders of the non-aligned countries who asserted that the credibility of IOs lay in the access to them beyond ideological differences and historical baggage. The profile of these IOs had gone up with the steady inflow from the newly independent countries in Africa and Pacific. With the increase in the membership, the stranglehold of the West had loosened to create politics of new majorities which in turn provided them fresh manoeuvring space. Both the ‘Free’ World and the Socialist world in the cold war era solicited the new camp. Within the UN, the nonaligned countries formed their own caucusing group whether in the General Assembly (Peterson 2006: 122-137; Sauvant 1983), the Security Council. Indeed the role of the Nonaligned (Group of 7) was indeed remarkable in certain instances (Jackson 1983; Prantl 2005: 577-578). On the flip side there emerged the ugly confrontation between the ‘tyrannical majority’ (the developing countries) on the one hand and the obstinate minority which flashed its ‘power of the purse’ (by the United States) in the budgetary forums of the world organization (Murthy 2003).

Beginning in the early 1960s, the Nonaligned brought pressure to create new organizations like UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the UN Industrial Development Organization (Luard 1977). Even within the Bretton Woods conservative setting, the new institutions had to come up to cater to the needs of the developing/nonaligned countries. The reference here is to the setting up of the International Development Association (IDA). While proliferation of institutions had not been without problems like duplication of work and turf wars among them and often alienated those resource-rich countries whose cooperation is necessary to make the organizations move forward, it remains the fact that the institutional entrepreneurship sharpened the focus on development needs in an unanticipated manner.

Promotion of Norms and Principles

The non-aligned countries have emphasized the Bandung principles of non-aggression, non-interference, peaceful co-existence. They have been quite particular in wanting strict compliance with the normative framework outlined in the Charter. Especially respect for sovereignty, non-intervention in internal affairs, and non-use of force formed the fulcrum of the nonaligned approach to international organizations' relationship with member countries (Rajan 1987). The specific norms and principles in various issues of human rights, development and disarmament followed from the stress on the governing principles of respect for sovereignty and international cooperation.

Through the UN, the nonaligned espoused certain norms and principles which defined the direction and scope of UN deliberations and actions – whether in disarmament, development and environment. In the case of disarmament, the nonaligned have actively advocated the 'General and Complete Disarmament' which was the chief clarion call of the UN in 1950s and 1960s. It meant pursuit of nuclear and conventional weapons disarmament (Strydom 2007: 9). Furthermore, the nonaligned seemed to press nuclear disarmament as the priority for negotiations in a multilateral framework. There was also the idea of 'negative security guarantees' (Baker 1985).

In the case of human rights, certain rights (especially the collective rights) were sought to be prioritized, such as the right of self-determination, the ‘right to development’, and the right to peace (Tyagi 1995: 441-451). In this respect the non-aligned and the socialist perspectives converged a lot. And therefore the non-aligned

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4 Ron Sanders (1989: 272) called UNCTAD a ‘constipated’ organization.
were pitted often against the Western approaches which stressed universality of human rights and precedence of responsibility to protect human rights over right to sovereign immunity.

In the development domain, the norms and principles advocated which became the organizational ideology especially during 1970s, was the ‘fair trade’ principles (UNCTAD), the norm of common heritage of mankind in regard to global commons, and in 1990s, the vigorous espousal of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. Similarly the standards of ‘health for all by 2000’ and ‘education for all’ constitute the new norms respectively of the WHO and UNESCO aimed at catering to the demands of the developing/nonaligned countries.

**Agenda and Action Programmes**

Throughout their association with the world organization, the nonaligned countries have preferred the UN to encourage peaceful settlement of differences as the preferred option and were not keen about coercive action either unilaterally or through the UN legitimation. As against the Western propensity to abuse the UN for ideological motivations or in contrast to the Socialist distrust of any over-active involvement of the UN, the non-aligned wished the UN to be a voice of ‘peace-loving’ countries with inexhaustible energies to explore avenues through diplomatic and non-coercive measures like mediation. The non-aligned countries played through the UN instrumentality mediator’s role in major issues such as the Korean crisis in 1950s or the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1970s. When the nonaligned were not likely to be effective in mediating in conflicts involving fellow nonaligned countries on opposite sides (as in Vietnam-Cambodia, Afghanistan-Pakistan, and Iran-Iraq conflicts) they supported the UN pacification efforts. It is notable in this context that the 1987 Geneva accords on Afghanistan (negotiated by the UN) included support for preservation of the neutral/nonaligned status as also guarantees by the signatories not to interfere in the internal matters of Afghanistan. Sadly however the UN accords did not lead to lasting peace in Afghanistan ever since. After the end of the cold war, the political troubles for the nonaligned countries because of civil uprisings against oppressive regimes and the sharp decline of both the nonaligned group as well as that of the UN as useful and effective mediators.

Unlike the peace-making efforts, the partnership between the non-aligned and the United Nations in peacekeeping has proved to be remarkable and rewarding. The non-aligned contribution in helping the UN as a mainstay of international peacekeeping is well acknowledged. Originally devised as a United States ploy to keep the communist camp away from sensitive Third World conflict, peacekeeping emerged soon as an area where the presence of troops from the non-aligned member countries demonstrated their commitments and capabilities for maintenance of international peace and security. According to some claims, the 1956 guidelines on peacekeeping were framed by a core-group that included non-aligned countries (Krishna Menon’s conversations with Brecher 1968). Whether during the cold war era or afterwards, no major UN peacekeeping operation could be planned or executed without the cooperation of such countries as lead and supporting participants.

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5 The CBDR principle, enshrined within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, was expounded in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This principle takes into account different contributions to global environmental degradation, envisages higher and binding obligations on the developed countries on emission cuts without matching cuts by the developing countries.

6 While pursuing their anti-Israeli and anti-apartheid agenda, the nonaligned made an exception to their preference not to resort to coercive action. The non-aligned successfully pushed the UN and such other organizations like UNESCO and ILO to endorse their disapproval of Israeli policies in occupied Palestine (Williams 1987). They also successfully pushed for the first every mandatory arms embargo by the UN Security Council against South Africa’s apartheid regime. On India’s role see Jaipal (1985).

7 James (1987) strikes a note of caution against singling out the non-aligned contributions for the success of UN peacekeeping. But the statistics reveal the overwhelming participation of the nonaligned and developing countries among the top troop contributing countries consistently during the past many years.
willing partners. For the UN peacekeeping technique has become a demonstrative tool to convince the newly emerged and nonaligned countries that there was no available alternative to the time-tested and cost effective UN peacekeeping presence. However, the context of intrastate conflicts posed challenges and dilemmas for UN peacekeeping in the post-cold war era. Neither the non-aligned nor the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy has any clues to make the peacekeeping both impartial and effective at the same time (Murthy 2001).

On economic development, the non-aligned – especially the Latin American countries in the 1950s followed by the rest of the Third World subsequently – have influenced the agenda setting of the UN. Whether in the context of advocating setting up of a UN development fund, setting up of Technical Assistance Programme, the negotiation of development strategies with sector-wise growth targets, the call for New International Economic Order at the sixth special session, and the aborted North-South dialogue in 1970s (Dadzie 1993). Such group concerns as economic cooperation among the developing countries (ECDC), mitigation of external debt, the ODA short-falls, the market access for the developing countries’ products formed part of the non-aligned agenda transported to the UN development forums. Economic and sustainable development were mainstreamed in every other major problem area – whether disarmament, environment, science and technology and so forth. Accordingly, agenda was set for separate organizations in related functional areas: the call for balanced information/communication order through UNESCO, the appropriate technology through UNIDO, the baby milk and easy access to technologies for producing drugs at low cost through WHO, etc. The non-aligned joined the UN in vainly hoping for the development dividend after the end of the cold war, but were disappointed at the lack of discernible progress. This is borne out of the less than desirable progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals aimed at advancing in human development indicators in respect of maternal health, enrolment of children, and combating of common diseases, etc. in the face of the lopsided effects of globalization.

As in the case of the UN, group negotiations were institutionalized in the IMF (in the form of G-24 as a subgroup of G77) with modest results to press for desired change in lending policies and democratic decision-making. In the context of the comparative advantage argument that disfavoured the UN in economic management matters and favoured the Bretton Woods agenda, the UN bureaucracy banked upon the political support of the non-aligned countries in critiquing the policies of the BWIs and favouring the coordination by the UN over the economic and financial institutions including the WTO (Stiglitz 2010).

Organizational Reform: A solution or a Problem?

The position of the nonaligned countries on reforming the international organizations is goal oriented: reforms need to be ‘comprehensive, transparent, inclusive and balanced’ (Strydom 2007: 15). Flowing from their belief in the indispensability of the United Nations, the nonaligned have historically shown a good deal of interest in working for necessary adaptations and improvements in the UN structures to enhance their influence. The first major involvement of the nonaligned countries in the UN reforms was the expansion of the non-permanent membership of the Security Council in the mid-1960s and the enlargement twice of the Economic and Social Council. The impact of the enlargement was felt differently on these two organs. The enlarged Security Council enhanced the influence of the small countries in that powerful organ, especially in isolating Israel and its ally the United States. Joined by China, they protested against the attempt by the superpowers’ combine to ignore the Council in the Arab-Israeli conflict-related negotiations. On the other hand, enlargement had a more negative impact on the Economic and Social Council since 1973. The ECOSOC was caught between the distrusting Western advanced countries which distanced themselves from that organ

8In fact taking advantage of the tenth anniversary of the UN, the Afro-Asian countries initiated a proposal for enlargement of non-permanent members from 6 to 10 which took nearly a decade to come into effect. The ECOSOC was expanded twice to accommodate the voices of the newly admitted members.
and the disgruntled Third World which tended to favour the more broad-based General Assembly at the expense of the expert ECOSOC (Weiss 2010).

The Secretariat is a more prominent object of reforms over the years. Because of the expanding activities and demand for greater and wider geographical representation, the Secretariat grew in strength while its efficiency levels are stated to be far from satisfactory. In fact, since mid-1980s, the UN Secretariat came in for drastic staff cuts (Saksena 1992). The United States targeted the Secretariat management practices by threatening to stop payment of dues, the developing and nonaligned countries were aggrieved about the negative impact of lean Secretariat on offices and activities dedicated to their needs and causes.

After the end of the Cold war, the UN Secretaries-General starting from Boutros Boutros-Ghali and his successor, Kofi Annan, launched a series of reform proposals to ‘reinvent the United Nations’ and to equip it to offer ‘Larger Freedoms’ to the humankind in the twenty-first century. The original non-aligned move mooted in the eighties to have only the non-permanent membership enlarged again was modified to cover both the non-permanent and the permanent categories. But the lack of progress on this complicated issue is, among other reasons, due to the inability of the non-aligned countries to endorse the claims of any particular country (India, Brazil, South Africa) for a permanent seat. The nonaligned group gatherings chose to limit themselves by endorsing the need to enlarge the Council’s membership without getting into the specifics. This is because of the deep differences and the apprehensions about the geopolitical losses entertained by the rivals of various claimants for the permanent seats. The disagreement within the non-aligned group is a much a factor as lack of enthusiasm among the existing permanent members (Murthy 2003).

Partly because of lack of progress on Security Council reform and partly due to the persistence of distrust about unreformed Security Council, the non-aligned tended to favour the General Assembly over the Security Council in the reform process. Apart from ensuring more regular reporting by the President of the Council to the Assembly President, the non-aligned countries pointedly underlined the thesis of shared responsibility (power sharing) between the General Assembly and the Security Council while setting up the Peacebuilding Commission in 2005. Indeed, these countries went a step further in designing the Human Rights Council to ensure that the new body reported only to the Assembly, and no say to the Security Council (Murthy 2007).

Falling under this category of initiatives, India on its own briefly took up a proposal to constrict the Security Council’s power in the process of the Secretary-General. India proposed that unlike the present practice of recommending one name to the General Assembly for appointment as the Secretary-General, it was proposed that a panel of names be forwarded so as to provide enough choice for consideration of the Assembly. The proposal was cold shouldered by the United States and other permanent members of the Security Council.

The criterion the non-aligned followed in the reform issue area is to support such reform proposals which were likely to strengthen the role of the UN in development and security matters. This is why many non-aligned countries were ill at ease with proposals that affected development agencies located in Africa (UNHABITAT and UNEP merger), disbanding UNCTAD, or creation of inter-sessional bureaus in ECOSOC. While the West did not see anything wrong with the Bank and the Fund, the Third World countries advocated restructuring of these institutions in order to loosen the stranglehold of the advanced countries by reviewing the weighted voting system or recasting the voting shares and the criticism about the huge social costs paid by the debtor countries as a result of toeing the line of the ‘Washington Consensus’. Although the Fund and the Bank responded piecemeal through instruments like oil facility, structural adjustment facility, social sector lending, assisting the heavily indebted countries, fundamental reforms aimed at increasing the SDR quotas for fast emerging economies are too little and late to come by. It may also be pertinent to the push being given to revive the non-aligned idea of yesteryears to bring the IMF and the IBRD under more effective coordination mechanisms of the UN (Kapur 1997 vol.1).

On regional and non-governmental organizations
It may also be useful to bring in some of the regional organizations here, as the salience of regional organizations has increased in the past two decades. The non-aligned traditionally expressed themselves against military alliances that were dubbed as regional organizations (like NATO) whose conformity to the UN Charter was questioned. Except for the common preference that regional organizations should work not in conflict with the UN framework, the non-aligned movement left the approach to regional organizations to be decided according to the situation prevailing in a particular region whether it is South America, Africa, Southeast Asia or even South Asia. Nevertheless, the experience shows that none of the regional organizations could perform matching with the expectations or in comparison with that achieved by the European Economic Community.

In the post-cold war era, sub-regional cooperation has received fillip. Scholars (Falk 1995: 5-6) perceived the resurgence of regionalism was an answer to guard against globalization processes. The Global South witnessed some of the active regional organizations: the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the Indian Ocean Rim Countries, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, and so forth. Some of them are active in multiple areas exceeding economic cooperation because the regional problems demanded so. Besides organizations, informal groups have emerged cutting across regional barriers. India-Brazil-South Africa, BASIC, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization exemplify this trend.⁹

As for international non-governmental organizations – mostly working in the area of human rights and sustainable development – the Third World remained lukewarm, if not seriously suspecting their hidden motives. The Amnesty International for example is suspected to carry their Western mentors’ prejudices to destabilise the respective fragile socio-political order in their respective countries. That is the reason why the non-aligned would prefer to closely monitor the activities of the INGOs and their financial sources; on the other hand, in the wake of the 2004 Cardoso Panel Report on strengthening the UN-Civil Society relationship, they have questioned the accountability and legitimacy claims of the INGOs.

Conclusion

The nonaligned have impacted the nature, composition and functional orientation of several international organizations of interest and concern to them. The discussion mainly demonstrates the mutuality of influences the UN and the nonaligned have brought to bear on each other, while the discussion refers to the influence of these countries in other inter-governmental organizations as well. Universal membership of most IGOs is owing to the interest and persistence of the nonaligned countries, while international attention on peacekeeping and development dilemmas as the chief preoccupations of a range of global and regional organizations (aside from the non-governmental organizations) can also be cited as evidence of the role of the nonaligned. The decline of the non-aligned group solidarity and effective participation in multilateral issues may not augur well for the future of international organizations – without which the project of global governance will remain at best incomplete, if not illegitimate.

⁹ Whereas in the cold war era the nonaligned group of countries upheld the strategy of staying away in order to avoid being sucked into the vortex of cold war, the NAM instituted now a new strategy of integration in the world in order not to be left out from the mainstream of technological development, and priority was given to various forms of regional linkages with developed countries” (Ranko Petkovic quoted in Morphet 2004: 528).
References


