



## **Non-alignment Policy as a Principle of Shaping the National Security of Azerbaijan**

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***Abstract.** Non-alignment as a foreign policy perspective is a critical factor of contemporary international relations. The paper focuses on the history of non-alignment policy during the Cold War and after its demise. The evolution of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is delineated, the challenges are highlighted, and prospects are estimated. The article looks at the current state of the NAM in the face of the rapidly changing international order. This paper presents the comparative analysis of Azerbaijan's security policy as a country pursuing non-alignment policy.*

### **Introduction**

After the Second World War, allied countries did not continue their cooperation on fighting against fascism and militarism. The economically and militarily-politically active country, USA was claiming the world

leadership. USSR on its turn was trying to carry out a communist revolution in Europe. And this confrontation between two different ideologies formed the struggle between two sides vying for dominance, exploiting every opportunity to exert undue influence especially on European countries.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of a bipolar world

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<sup>1</sup> Iskandarov Khayal, "The road of integration of Azerbaijan into NATO (1994-2014)", *The Caucasus and the world*, 2015, №19, pp. 85-90.

and the formation of two military blocks (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) after the Second World War ushered in an intense rivalry between different countries. Finding an effective grand strategy to survive between two hostile powers inevitably requires a balanced policy. In this context, the underdeveloped countries felt the need to join efforts for the common defense of their interests, to strengthen their independence and sovereignty and to express a strong commitment for peace by declaring themselves as “non-aligned” from either of the two nascent military blocks.<sup>2</sup> This need ended up with the formation of a new organization, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The stated dominant objective of the NAM was to facilitate and provide a viable platform for countries, which did not want to align themselves militarily with the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> In the past, the NAM enabled member and aspiring countries to avoid the limitations and entanglements of other alliances. In fact, non-alignment for those countries was a strategy for survival as a free and independent sovereign nation. The NAM was born at a tumultuous time when a plethora of countries was striving to get rid of the colonial rule. Moreover, the arms race threatened the planet as never before.

The term non-alignment was first coined by George Liska. He used it to describe the policies of the states which decided not to join either of the two power blocs in world politics in the post-WWII years. George Liska was the first to come close to accepting the term of Non-alignment, in a really scientific manner.<sup>4</sup> The decision to adopt non-alignment was not merely an idealistic dream of neutrality, but it was rather based upon a realistic assessment of particular countries’

geopolitical situations. It gave those countries room to maneuver according to their own interests rather than allowing them to become confined within the limitations of a Cold War alliance. Hindsight revealed the consequences of this approach.

### **Non-alliance policy: Challenges and prospects**

Non-Aligned Movement was founded by the countries that wanted to resist the efforts of NATO and the Warsaw Pact to enlist them in the Cold War. Despite the criticism and skepticism of some politicians and experts, such as John Foster Dulles and Henry Kissinger, non-alignment functioned throughout the Cold War both as a movement and as a strategy.<sup>5</sup> With the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, the détente between former adversaries rendered the NAM useless, whereas the United States had been considered the only superpower. However, approximately thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the Non-Aligned Movement still exists. Is it just a remnant of the Cold War or its existence is still needed in today’s geopolitical situation? NATO was also deemed the vestige of a bygone era. However, it proved its relevance, even importance, in the wake of the 1991 Rome summit, through adopting a new Strategic Concept ushering in the transformation of the Alliance. The international system or, to be precise, the dynamics of the new world order are constantly changing. This also justifies the need for the NAM to continue because the system could end up with several rival blocs or power centers in the future. In order to continue and be relevant and efficient, the movement must be

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<sup>2</sup> History and Evolution of Non-Aligned Movement, <https://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?20349/History+and+Evolution+of+NonAligned+Movement> (Access date: 22.08.2012).

<sup>3</sup> Prarthana Kashinath, “Why the Non-Aligned Movement Needs to Be Resuscitated”, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/10/why-the-non-aligned-movement-needs-to-be-resuscitated/> (Access date: 20.10.2016).

<sup>4</sup> Arshad Rasool, Arihal Pulwama, “Non-Aligned Movement in 21st Century: Relevant or Redundant? ...A Debate”, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Volume 11, Issue 4 (May. - Jun. 2013), pp. 64-70 e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845.

<sup>5</sup> Houman A. Sadri, *Nonalignment as a Foreign Policy Strategy: Dead or Alive*, January 1999, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292420040\\_No\\_nalignment\\_as\\_a\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_Strategy\\_Dead\\_or\\_Alive](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292420040_No_nalignment_as_a_Foreign_Policy_Strategy_Dead_or_Alive) (Access date: January 1999).

revamped and reshaped.<sup>6</sup> Today, the main purpose of the NAM is to serve as a mechanism aimed at applying the principles of international law. The movement believes that each country is a sovereign and independent state, and everything should be adjusted to that status, regardless of the size of that country. In order to shed light on it we should hark back to the Bandung Conference when core principles of NAM were adopted for the first time. The Bandung principles included:<sup>7</sup>

1. Respect of fundamental human rights and of the objectives and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

2. Respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.

3. Recognition of the equality among all races and of the equality among all nations, both large and small.

4. Non-intervention or non-interference into the internal affairs of another -country.

5. Respect of the right of every nation to defend itself, either individually or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.

6. a. Non-use of collective defense pacts to benefit the specific interests of any of the great powers. b. Non-use of pressures by any country against other countries.

7. Refraining from carrying out or threatening to carry out aggression, or from using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.

8. Peaceful solution of all international conflicts in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.

9. Promotion of mutual interests and of cooperation.

10. Respect of justice and of international obligations.

We apparently see that the Bandung principles state that member countries will refrain from using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country, settle all international disputes by peaceful means and promote mutual interests and cooperation. In a nutshell, they contribute to world peace through creating a third group to water down the tension between different blocs. If the members of this Movement had taken sides in the Cold War between the Eastern and the Western blocs, the war would have been even deeper than it was. Through declaring their non-alignment policy, the countries participating in the NAM avoided being the playgrounds of the confrontation of the superpowers. For instance, through pursuing non-alignment policy India, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand managed to survive unscathed, unlike Afghanistan, Vietnam and Korea, countries who suffered most during to the Cold War. Because of the positive neutrality that the Movement exhibited, the world has become a more peaceful place to live in.<sup>8</sup> NAM countries have contributed immensely with troops to UN and NATO operations when their objectives matched those of the respective international organizations.

Nevertheless, sometimes malign ambitions (because of diverse and competing interests) of member states overcame the founding principles of NAM. Apart from the proclivity towards either bloc (Western or Eastern) some members have even gone to war with one another (for instance, India and Pakistan, Iran and Iraq). On the other hand, the global powers, such as the United States, EU, Russia and China, have had the resources to limit NAM's ability to impact global trends or to enforce its resolutions. The NAM does not have any viable tools and internal mechanisms to enforce UNSC resolutions, which have been pending for years. The NAM

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<sup>6</sup> Keethaponcalan S.I. Reshaping the Non-Aligned Movement: challenges and vision, Oct 4, 2016, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40728-016-0032-3> (Access date: 04.10.2016).

<sup>7</sup> History and Evolution of Non-Aligned Movement, <https://mea.gov.in/in-focus->

[article.htm?20349/History+and+Evolution+of+NonAlign ed+Movement](https://www.virtualkollage.com/2017/02/advantages-of-non-aligned-movement.html) (Access date: 22.08.2012).

<sup>8</sup> Advantages of the Non-Aligned Movement, <https://www.virtualkollage.com/2017/02/advantages-of-non-aligned-movement.html> (Access date: 19.02.2017).

has never assumed any mediating role between the countries which were in conflict with each other and has not defined such a role for itself. That is the reason why the Movement was broadly accepted as impotent in the face of political instability and border disputes amongst member states. Continued ties with their former colonial masters in some countries (control and hegemony of external forces) imposed undue limits on their independent policies. NAM is a coalition of nations seeking consensus - the closest possible convergence of views on matters of mutual interest. However, sometimes a conflict of interests and ideological differences among leaders were inevitable, and of course, it wreaked havoc on the efficiency of the whole Movement. And these are still the most sobering challenges for member states looming over the future years. In spite of those limited abilities, the NAM could have a larger role in the future. The Movement has influenced international thinking on many issues, including apartheid, decolonization, wars of national liberation, withdrawal of foreign forces from fledgling countries and sovereignty over natural resources. Even though NAM membership does not rule out conflict, it reduces its likelihood. The Non-Aligned Movement offers its members a forum where they can discuss their common problems and work out strategies to tackle international complications of peace, security, development, terrorism, human rights and environmental safety. It is important to recognize that when the NAM was founded its principles did not seek to form a third or alternate bloc in order to serve as a counterbalance against the influence of the superpowers.<sup>9</sup> The bottom line is, we have to perceive the NAM as a movement not an

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<sup>9</sup> Jason E. Strakes, "Azerbaijan and the Non-Aligned Movement: Institutionalizing the "Balanced Foreign Policy" Doctrine", *IAI working papers* 15/11 - May 2015 ISSN 2280-4341/ISBN 978-88-98650-35-4, p.6, <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1511.pdf> (Access date: 05.05.2015).

<sup>10</sup> Iskandarov Khayal, Sadiyev Sadi, "The evolution of the security environment in the South Caucasus since the end

organization which leads to more equitable, peaceful, prosperous and secure world.

### **The experience of Azerbaijan as a country pursuing non-alliance policy**

Geopolitical realities are what largely shape a state's attitude towards others. The geopolitics of the South Caucasus is complicated, volatile and fragile. Three independent countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia) once were a part of the same empire. After the demise of the Soviet Union, all three countries got their independence. The paths of the three South Caucasus republics have been different ever since in terms of their geo-political orientations, with Armenia being a CSTO member, Azerbaijan pursuing an independent policy regarding global powers, and Georgia, apparently, demonstrating a pro-NATO position.<sup>10</sup> The lack of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russia's increased assertiveness in the region and the absence of a NATO presence are central elements in understanding the current situation in the region.<sup>11</sup>

In 1993, when national leader Heydar Aliyev came to power, Azerbaijan was teetering on the brink of civil war.<sup>12</sup> The mixture of internal politics with geopolitics had made the conduct of foreign policy much more complex. Having gone from a checkered past to a democracy, Azerbaijan was struggling to institutionalize democratic changes. Then, President Heydar Aliyev established a balanced foreign policy in order to get around the looming civil war in the country. Today, his balancing act is evident in relations with the West, Russia and Iran, which

of the Cold War", *17<sup>th</sup> Workshop of the PFP Consortium Study Group Regional Stability in the South Caucasus*, "What a New European Security Deal" could mean for the South Caucasus, 14/2018, pp. 47-53.

<sup>11</sup> Nasirov Elman, Iskandarov Khayal, Sadiyev Sadi, "The South Caucasus: A playground between NATO and Russia?", *Connections QJ* 16, no. 3 (2017): pp. 47-56.

<sup>12</sup> Iskandarov Khayal, "The road of integration of Azerbaijan into NATO (1994-2014)", *The Caucasus and the world*, 2015, №19, pp. 85-90.

aims to avoid antagonizing global and regional powers.

Today, Azerbaijan is in a situation of war. 20 percent of its territory has been occupied by Armenia, which is a member of CSTO. However, this fact does not intimidate Baku because an occupied part is an integral part of Azerbaijan and CSTO does not have any right to meddle in, if a war breaks out again. Azerbaijan's rising global profile is reshaping its approach towards major partnerships in the changing global order. Azerbaijan is showing signs of pursuing strategic autonomy separately from non-alignment since it has all the resources to sustain this approach. The country benefits from utilizing different partnerships rather than shunning them. Azerbaijan needs deeper engagement with its friends and partners if it is to develop advantage in its dealings with its adversaries. Azerbaijan is today well positioned to define its bilateral relationships on its own terms without political and ideological influences from other countries.

A non-aligned approach to relations with global and regional powers has been in practice long before Azerbaijan's formal integration into the NAM in 2011. It makes sense to differentiate three phases of Azerbaijan's foreign policy after it gained its post-Cold War independence: 1991-1993, 1993-2003, 2003-present). The overridingly important objective goal since 1993 has been to preserve Azerbaijan's independence and make it a leading country in the region, as well as increase its role in the international arena. Thus, Azerbaijan's non-alignment is an upshot of a pragmatic foreign policy rooted in ground realities. Rather than representing a drastic shift in its external orientation, Azerbaijan's membership in NAM is a natural extension of the "balanced foreign policy"

introduced by the national leader Heydar Aliyev and is successfully conducted by the incumbent government. This essentially informal realist approach was initiated in the context of the severe challenges posed by domestic instability, encirclement by hostile regional powers and the loss of sovereignty over nearly one-fifth of the national territory to Armenian occupying forces.<sup>13</sup> Azerbaijan remains neutral and judges every issue on its merit. Azerbaijan does not allow others to use its territory for any hostile activities against its neighbors or any other countries. Not aligning with any of the superpower military alliances is one of the stated objectives of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. In a nutshell, Azerbaijan's non-alignment policy is predicated on the principles like peaceful coexistence with neighbors, nonparticipation in military pacts and no granting of military bases to the great powers. As the national leader Heydar Aliyev mentioned: "You can't be friends with some countries and enemies with others despite the fact that this is the way most countries function. Azerbaijan doesn't want to be the enemy of any country. At the same time, we will not become victim to another country's policies. Azerbaijan has its own independent policy. We are developing good relations with Europe and America and seek to benefit from their experiences while preserving our own national identity and resources".<sup>14</sup>

Some countries have argued that non-alignment requires equidistance from the superpowers, but that is a minority view. The reality is that there is no concept of an equal relationship in global geopolitics. It has been broadly accepted that a tendency towards any superpower (US or Russia in Azerbaijan's case) does not disqualify a nation from membership in the NAM. Participating in the NAM obviously means non-

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<sup>13</sup> Jason E. Strakes, "Azerbaijan and the Non-Aligned Movement: Institutionalizing the "Balanced Foreign Policy" Doctrine", *IAI working papers* 15/11 - May 2015 ISSN 2280-4341/ISBN 978-88-98650-35-4, p.3, May 5, 2015, <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1511.pdf> (Access date: 05.05.2015).

<sup>14</sup> Jason E. Strakes, "Azerbaijan and the Non-Aligned Movement: Institutionalizing the "Balanced Foreign Policy" Doctrine", *IAI working papers* 15/11 - May 2015 ISSN 2280-4341/ISBN 978-88-98650-35-4, p.2, <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1511.pdf> (Access date: 05.05.2015).

alignment with military blocs. Some members of the NAM are involved in alignment with any other superpower, such as US, Russia and China in pursuit of deepening their bilateral relations in the changing global arena. For instance, Belarus is a member of CSTO, India and South Africa are in BRICS, Uzbekistan is in SCO. Apart from these all African countries participating in the NAM are members of the African Union at the same time. Non-alignment is not an ideology but a smorgasbord of positions, which have varied over time.<sup>15</sup>

Azerbaijan has tacitly supported NATO while strategic objectives chimed with each other's and contradicted the policy measures what it found irrelevant (for instance Kosovo issue). Azerbaijan was one of the most active members of the anti-terrorist coalition and has assigned a certain number of troops to those operations. Between one third and 40 percent of US supplies to Afghanistan went through Azerbaijan or its air space.<sup>16</sup> Then, Azerbaijan eschewed imposing sanctions on Iran while the whole Europe did it even though there has been no security threat posed to Azerbaijan. On the other hand, it is abundantly clear that by siding with the West, Azerbaijan opposed to some moves of Russia and Iran (for example, in the Russo-Georgian and Syrian wars and in the Crimea crisis). The objectives of Azerbaijan's security policy are to preserve its independence, maintain peace, contribute to stability and security in the region and strengthen international peace and security. Azerbaijan as a NAM country pursues a policy of non-participation in military alliances. This security policy, enabling our country to remain neutral in the event of conflicts, serves us well. For instance, choosing Baku to arrange the meetings between the US and Russian (February 2017), as well as NATO and Russian (September 2017) military leaders was not a

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Armstrong, "Nicaragua: Sovereignty and Non-Alignment", September 25, 2007, <https://nacla.org/article/nicaragua-sovereignty-and-non-alignment> (Access date: 25.09.2007).

<sup>16</sup> Iskandarov Khayal, "The role of Azerbaijan as a NATO partner in global security", *Съвременни предизвикателства пред сигурността и отбраната*,

coincidence. Azerbaijan's multi-vector policy enabled it to earn friends in the international arena. Azerbaijan's membership in the NAM provided it with a formal foundation for its independent foreign policy that would potentially reinforce its leadership position within and beyond the South Caucasus region.<sup>17</sup>

Looking to the future, it is more apparent than ever that security is more than the absence of military conflict. Threats to peace and the security of the country can best be averted by acting concertedly and in cooperation with other countries. Azerbaijan will chair the NAM in 2019-2022. The XVIII Summit of the NAM will be held in Baku. It has a symbolic meaning, because exactly 30 years after the 1989 Belgrade Summit Europe will have an opportunity of hosting the heads of the states and governments participating in the NAM. Through holding this remarkable Summit and assuming the chairmanship for the next three years Azerbaijan exhibits the signs of allegiance to the objective and principles of the NAM and it will certainly contribute to international peace, security, and cooperation.

### Conclusion

The world again is facing convoluted crises identical to the Cold War era threatening development and security. The bipolar international system (so called "Second Cold War") brings the NAM's founding principles to the fore again. Now more than ever, NAM's existence is vital to contributing to world peace. Non-alignment, as a foreign policy instrument, ensures multilateralism, equality and mutual understanding in maintaining peace and security and promotes the needs of member countries to effectively deal with the new global realities and challenges. Today, Azerbaijan's neutrality

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<sup>17</sup> Jason E. Strakes, Ibid.

consists of refraining from taking sides, both militarily and politically, in case of armed conflict. Neutrality is a part of Azerbaijan's national identity. Azerbaijan's membership in the NAM therefore provides it with a formal foundation for its independent foreign policy that potentially reinforces its leadership position within and beyond the South Caucasus region. It has the opportunity to pursue any economic, political, cultural and social goals of its choice. It does not expect any form of interference from any quarters especially from any of the two

world powers, the US and Russia. It is, however, erroneous to assume that only the small states need and could use the NAM as a platform. Non-alignment does not mean isolation. Azerbaijan is an enthusiastic partner of NATO and maintains warm relations with both Russia and Iran. The growing partnerships with other Alliances do not forestall the engagement with these countries. Azerbaijan will not be cajoled, enticed or coerced into actions that would jeopardize its standing as a leading country in the South Caucasus region.

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