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## Non-Alignment 2.0



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# The War in Ukraine and the Active Non-Alignment Option

Jorge Heine



Research Professor,  
Pardee School of Global  
Studies, Boston University  
Non-Resident Global Fellow,  
The Wilson Center  
Former Ambassador of  
Chile to China (2014-2017)

The war in Ukraine is a turning point in world affairs. As the bloodiest confrontation in Europe since World War Two, and with no end in sight, it has brought the horrors of war back to a continent that many thought had left them long behind. Amidst the destruction, deaths and human suffering conveyed worldwide on the evening news from a land that is at the very core of the Eurasian landmass, “the World Island,” in the expression of Halford Mackinder, commentators have seen a silver lining: “the return of the West.”<sup>1</sup> By this, they mean the unity of purpose and common will shown by NATO and other members of the hegemonic coalition led by the United States, like Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, in supporting Ukraine. The swiftness with which the U.S. Congress approved a \$40 billion package in mostly military aid to Ukraine is emblematic of this. The same goes for other massive transfers of heavy weapons from European countries to Ukraine.

After what many perceived to be President Trump’s doubts about the wisdom of the US commitment to NATO, this has brought fresh energy and resolve to a Western alliance that in recent years had been known more for its internal bickering than anything else. Less convincing, though, are grander claims made about the effects of the Ukraine war on world order. To argue, as some have, that the war has brought to the fore the cleavage between democracy and authoritarianism as the main one in today’s world, is not accurate. Some of the world’s largest democracies, like India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Mexico, have taken a studiously neutral stance on the war. In fact, if we add up the countries that have *not* sided with the West on this issue, they represent more than half of the world’s population.

<sup>1</sup> H. J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): 421–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1775498>.

Over the past few years, a rapprochement between India and the United States took place. Prime Minister Modi and President Trump hit it off and exchanged visits in quick succession. PM Modi also visited the White House, invited by President Biden to take part in the first summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) in 2021. India holds center stage in the US Indo-Pacific strategy, Washington's top foreign policy priority. Yet, India refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and is keen to buy more, not less, oil from Russia, despite the imposition of US sanctions on trade with Moscow. India discovered its Non-Aligned roots, and, in Europe's biggest crisis since World War Two, acted accordingly.

Seventeen African countries, most prominently South Africa, abstained in the UN General Assembly vote on the issue. And many more, that voted in favor of condemning the invasion, have opposed the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia, fully aware that more people will die from hunger across the Global South from these sanctions than will in the war in Ukraine. According to the United Nations, 13.1 million people could go hungry because of the war. In Latin America, the leaders of the largest nations - Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico - have proclaimed their neutrality in the Ukraine conflict. Two of them made state visits to Moscow shortly before the war erupted. The Brazilian President said he was there "in solidarity" with Russia.

In the past few years, Latin American countries have found themselves between a rock and a hard place, as they try to navigate the choppy waters of U.S.-China tensions. Issues like infrastructure projects, digital connectivity and the deployment of 5G technology have been at the forefront of these tensions, with Washington pressuring Latin American countries not to do business with China. Revealingly, even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and an economic recession, several Latin American governments from the Right, Left, and Center have walked the fine line that allowed them to keep their eyes on their own interests, without letting themselves be cajoled into mechanically siding either with Washington or with Beijing.

Exhibit A of this approach was what happened in late 2021, with the Summit for Democracies held in Washington DC on December 8-10, and the China-CELAC Ministerial Forum held in Mexico City on December 2-3. The overwhelming majority of Latin American countries participated in both meetings and saw no contradiction in doing so.<sup>2</sup> Why should they?

2 Catherine Osborn, "Latin America Could Profit from US-China Competition," Foreign Policy, December 10, 2021, <https://foreign-policy.com/2021/12/10/latin-america-china-celac-democracy-summit-active-nonalignment/>.

## The Active Non-Alignment Option

Welcome to Non-Alignment 2.0, or, as my colleagues Carlos Fortín and Carlos Ominami and I call it in our recent book, *Active Non-Alignment and Latin America: A Doctrine for the New Century*, Active Non-Alignment (ANA).<sup>3</sup> As the world stumbles towards the Second Cold War, developing nations realize that if they want to safeguard their autonomy, the last thing they need to do is to align themselves with either of the great powers.

ANA draws on the honorable traditions of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), championed by the likes of Nehru, Nasser and Sukarno in the fifties and sixties. It is also inspired by the “autonomy school” in the Latin American International Relations literature, by scholars like Brazilian Helio Jaguaribe and Argentine Juan Carlos Puig. Mostly, though, it recognizes what the World Bank has called the “Wealth Shift” from the North Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific that has taken place in the new century.

In 2050, the top three economies will be China, India, and the U.S., in that order. Of the Top Ten economies in the world in 2050, seven will be non-Western ones. The diplomacy of the *cahiers des doléances* of the old Third World has been replaced by what Roberts, Armijo and Katada refer to as “collective financial statecraft.”<sup>4</sup> This is epitomized by new multinational development banks like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB, the so-called “BRICS bank”) that have opened new vistas for countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The strengthening of regional mechanisms, a commitment to multilateralism, to regional coordination in global economic governance, and a reorientation of Latin American foreign policies towards these new realities, are all part of the measures needed to advance this Active Non-Alignment agenda.

The reactions across the Global South to the war in Ukraine and the subsequent Western sanctions on Russia showed that the Active Non-Alignment foreign policy option is by no means limited to Latin America. It has also gained traction in Africa and Asia, which is where the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was originally born, mainly under the leadership of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The initial ANA proposal was largely driven by the impact on third parties of U.S.-China tensions, and what we refer to as an incipient Second Cold War between Washington and Beijing. The current U.S.-Russia conflict playing out in Ukraine has its own features, which are

3 Carlos Fortín, Jorge Heine, and Carlos Ominami, *El No Alineamiento Activo y América Latina: Una doctrina para el nuevo siglo* (Santiago, Chile: Catalonia, 2021).

4 Cynthia Roberts, Saori N Katada, and Leslie Elliott Armijo, *The BRICS and Collective Financial Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, C, 2017).

different from the former, but does share some common elements, including what has been dubbed “the West versus the Rest” dynamics.<sup>5</sup>

A key role in this is played by an informal group, an entity that is willfully ignored by Western media and opinion-makers, that is, the BRICS. The latter brings together Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, in a group that has held yearly summits since 2009, that has its own bank - the New Development Bank, NDB, founded in 2015, headquartered in Shanghai, and with a capital of \$50 billion, that has lent \$15 billion by now, and that is well-evaluated by credit-rating agencies. The BRICS has positioned itself as a critical interlocutor and voice within the Global South, creating links and networks among these non-Western heavyweights that cut across ideology. With the possibility of further expansion by adding other G20 members from the developing world, like Argentina and Indonesia, the BRICS embodies the New South that has emerged in the new century.<sup>6</sup>

In turn, this leads us to another critical element in the rise of the ANA option. There is little doubt that the United States has many advantages in its competition with China for the hearts and minds of people in the developing world. These include the primacy of the US dollar in the international financial system; its extensive alliances; and its dominance of the Bretton Woods institutions. Yet, as C. Fred Bergsten has observed, “China...may have more capability in the development finance arena than in any other.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the plethora of Chinese international institutional initiatives in this area: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the NDB, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM). At a time when in Africa, Asia, and Latin America the critical issue - perhaps more than any other - is development, this puts China in a strong position, if not necessarily in the driver’s seat, in this competition.

## ANA does not mean neutrality

Active Non-Alignment does not mean neutrality. The latter, by definition, entails an unwillingness to take positions on international matters. Switzerland, with its unwillingness to join the EU and, until 2002, even the United Nations, epitomizes this policy, although it may be worth noting that it has strayed from it in the case of the war in Ukraine. The ANA foreign policy option does not mean refusing to have a posture on certain international issues. What it signifies is a refusal to align automatically with

5 Angela Stent, “The West vs. the Rest: Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cold War,” *Foreign Policy*, May 2, 2022, <https://foreign-policy.com/2021/12/10/latin-america-china-cel-ac-democracy-summit-active-nonalignment/>.

6 Jorge Heine, “How Many BRICS in the Wall?,” *Global Times*, June 1, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1267129.shtml>.

7 Carl Fred Bergsten, *The United States vs. China the Quest for Global Economic Leadership* (Cambridge, Polity, 2022).

one or another of the major powers. It means that governments will put their own national interests front and center, rather than those of foreign powers. In the heydays of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), non-alignment meant, at a bare minimum, not joining military alliances of either superpower, i.e., the United States or the Soviet Union. In the new century, in a much more globalized and interdependent world, a more flexible approach may be needed. India, the birthplace of non-alignment, is a case in point.

As mentioned above, India is a member of the Quad, a military alliance that brings together the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, an entity that was given a strong boost under President Trump, and even more so under President Biden. Yet, it is also a member of the BRICS and has not only refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine but has also opposed sanctions on Russia and has increased its purchases of (heavily discounted) Russian oil in the wake of the war.

In short, the war in Ukraine marks a before and after in world affairs. As often happens, it is the German language that provides us with the best way to describe it - a *Zeitenwende*, an epochal change. It is only fitting that at such a moment an emerging Global South takes a page from the initial stirrings of the post-colonial movement, adapts it to the challenges of the new century and embraces Active Non-Alignment in its various forms and incarnations.

# India's Response to the War in Ukraine: Future Dilemmas and Strategies

Varun Sahni



Professor of International Politics,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi  
Former Vice-Chancellor, University of  
Goa

In the global response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, India was amongst a handful of countries that refused to be corralled into condemning the Russian action and/or acting against Russian interests. To most observers, India's response (or lack thereof) was puzzling, not least because India's relations with the United States are currently better than they have ever been. During the Crimean crisis of 2014, India's response was similarly muted, but there is one glaring difference: India was in election mode in 2014, with polling across the country staggered across six weeks, whereas in 2022 there is a strong leadership with proactive foreign policy goals securely installed in power. Various reasons and motivations, some plausible, others quite fanciful, have been attributed to India, and this article seeks to disentangle them. We will first analyze the proximate reasons for India's behavior and then take a deeper dive into India's longer-term perceptions and motivations.

## History, hi-tech and hydrocarbons

In the first place, Indian reticence in openly criticizing Russia reflects the longstanding friendship of the two countries going back to the Soviet period. Indian public opinion attitudes consistently and unambiguously treat Russia as a "friend of India." Across India's diverse and divided political spectrum, there is widespread reluctance to publicly criticize Russia.

Secondly, India's security dependence on Russian military hardware reduces

its diplomatic flexibility. In 2009-2013 India emerged as the world's largest arms importer, purchasing 14 percent of the world's total arms exports. Of India's arms imports during this period, over 75 percent came from Russia. India lives in a tough neighborhood and Russia is currently key to its military modernization program. It would not be in India's interest to alienate Russia and particularly President Vladimir Putin.

Finally, assuring guaranteed access to energy supplies is now a potent foreign policy driver for India, which has an enormous population that is growing and modernizing rapidly from a low socioeconomic base. India has the sixth largest energy consumption in the world, and one of the fastest growth rates of increasing energy consumption. Access to heavily discounted Russian oil, even for a few months, was a huge attraction that India wished to take full advantage of.

## **A non-issue called democracy**

There is also considerable skepticism in India about the way in which the U.S. and the West have used democracy as a foreign policy tool. India's democratic credentials are authentic and formidable: Seventy-five years of genuine liberal democracy in a pluralist, multicultural, socio-economically deprived, continent-sized setting is an achievement of world historical importance that deserves to be celebrated. Nevertheless, there are three reasons for India's reluctance to play the democracy card in its foreign relations.

Firstly, India has very *Indian* reasons for being democratic: From the founding moments of the Republic, participative and representative politics have created the space for socio-cultural pluralism within India. The second reason is India's ambiguous relationship with the Western market democracies. India has never been a part of the Western security community: Threats to India have not been seen by the West as threats to *democracy*. The liturgical roll call of post-9/11 terrorist outrages included Bali, Madrid, and London but not Mumbai, Ahmedabad, or Delhi. Thirdly, India resides in an undemocratic neighborhood. In most of India's neighbors, democracy has either been completely absent or has been at best a fleeting visitor. Thus, India does not have the luxury to focus on countries that are democratic. Furthermore, overt Indian support for democratic forces in its neighboring countries would significantly *weaken* those forces. India's

interest in democracy is domestic; the West's framing of the Russia-Ukraine war as a struggle between authoritarianism and democracy therefore does not reverberate in India.

## **The perpetual quest for strategic autonomy**

Going past the proximate reasons, an assessment of India's external relations from the moment of its birth as a sovereign territorial state in 1947 reveals a stubborn resistance to all external attempts to influence its foreign policy decisions. During World War II, the Indian Army, with 2.5 million men under arms, raised the largest all-volunteer military force in human history and played a decisive role in the defeat of the Axis Powers across a multitude of war theaters. Despite its wartime contribution, India was unable to secure a permanent UN Security Council seat at the San Francisco Conference due to its colonial status; truly a "near miss" that explains India's enduring reluctance to replace London with any other external power center in the promotion and protection of its vital interests.

The plain geographical fact is that India is a large country, demographically and territorially, and has been so since 1947 despite its partition to create Pakistan. The consciousness of being big lies at the root of India's perpetual quest for strategic autonomy. India is far too big to lie under the security umbrella of any other power, a condition that will only accentuate over time as India's power increases in both absolute and relative terms. Indeed, India's nuclear choices are best understood in the context of this primal and compelling interest. While India could well become a strategic partner of the U.S. in the future, especially in the troubled geostrategic context of the Indo-Pacific region, an India-U.S. alliance relationship – akin to the relations that the U.S. currently enjoys within the North Atlantic alliance or with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and Israel – is highly unlikely to fructify for precisely the reasons already enunciated.

## **The revival of non-alignment**

The preceding discussion brings us to non-alignment, which was the attempt by India as a large but weak post-colonial state to maintain policy autonomy in a bipolar world. Although it is now often derided in India, non-alignment was an original foreign policy that was both prudent (from a

realist perspective) and ethical (from a normative perspective). However, by 1971, in the face of an emerging Washington-Beijing-Islamabad axis and in anticipation of another war against Pakistan, India signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. For twenty years after that, India enjoyed a quasi-alliance relationship with the Soviet Union that provided it with a sense of security backup. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, India has been essentially “friendless” in the international system: It has friendly relations with many countries but friendship – in the sense of mutual support in security matters – with none.

In recent years, there have been a couple of interesting attempts to revive the notion of non-alignment. The first, labeled “non-alignment 2.0,” was by a set of Indian scholars in 2014;<sup>1</sup> the second, characterized as “Active Non-Alignment,” was by a group of Latin American thinkers in 2021.<sup>2</sup> Carlos Fortín, Jorge Heine and Carlos Ominami assert about Active Non-Alignment: “This is not a question of resurrecting anachronistic foreign policy approaches. On the contrary, we are proposing an up-to-date alternative, attuned to the imperatives of the new century.”<sup>3</sup> This is perhaps a good moment to look back at the original doctrine of non-alignment.

K. P. Misra, preeminent scholar of the original foreign policy doctrine of non-alignment, characterized it as “a movement which the Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans espouse to transform the present international order into an order based on justice to subserve their national objective of creating socio-economically strong and politically viable political systems within their respective countries.”<sup>4</sup> Despite the passage of over four decades since Misra penned these words, they resonate deeply today, which says something profoundly significant about the persisting North-South divide in the world economy. Misra dismisses the notion that non-alignment is a negative concept and affirms that it is through negative terms that Indians have expressed since time immemorial positive and affirmative ideas of profound significance: instead of “many,” there is “non-one” (*aneka*), Gandhi’s beloved value of “non-violence” (*ahimsaa*) has a gravitas that “peace” (*shanti* or *aman*) somehow lacks. To Indian ears, “non-grudge” (*avaira*) sounds better than “tolerance,” and so on. Setting terminological issues aside, non-alignment was not a negative concept substantively either: Its essential thrust – national reconstruction aided and supported by appropriate international transformation – was robustly positive.

Non-alignment is routinely dismissed today by rhetorically questioning what

1 Sunil Khilnani, *Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign & Strategic Policy for India in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New Delhi, India: Penguin Books, 2014).

2 Carlos Fortín, Jorge Heine, and Carlos Ominami (eds.) *El No Alineamiento Activo y América Latina: una doctrina para el nuevo siglo* (Santiago, Chile: Catalonia, 2021).

3 Carlos Fortín, Jorge Heine, and Carlos Ominami, “Latin America between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Second Cold War and the Active Non-Alignment Option,” *Global Policy*, October 2, 2020, 15, <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/02/10/2020/latin-america-between-rock-and-hard-place-second-cold-war-and-active-non-alignment>.

4 K. P. Misra, “Towards Understanding Non-Alignment,” *International Studies* 20, no. 1-2 (January 1981): 23–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002088178102000103>.

it could possibly mean in a world that is no longer bipolar, a question that conveniently ignores the historical transformation of the non-aligned agenda in the late 1970s and early 1980s from the East-West geopolitical polarity to the North-South geo-economic divide. We could ask a similarly meaningless question of the word “computer,” a device that most of us use for every task other than computing.

## Hedging or transcending?

Although this article began with an analysis of India’s responses to invasion and war on the European continent, Europe is no longer the cockpit of world affairs. The global center of gravity has shifted to the Indo-Pacific region, and it is to the new central theater that we will shift our attention.

The rise of China and the reactions of China neighbors to its rise are converting the Indo-Pacific – the Asian landmass and its surrounding waters – into a zone of security interdependence. Asia is currently in the throes of political modernity: The primary driver of politics in Asia is the sovereign territorial state *perfecting* its sovereign territoriality. European postmodern pretensions, in a shambles in Europe itself, are especially irrelevant to Asia. Furthermore, Asia is not a “naturally” Sino-centric continent immune to the logic of balance of power politics. There is no deep historical memory of Chinese ascendancy south of the Himalayas; India and China first encountered each other in mid-twentieth century as large, weak, post-colonial, *sovereign territorial* states. Thus, while Europe’s present is not Asia’s present, Europe’s past could well be Asia’s future.

Current trends and reasonable projections suggest that India will by the next decade have to contend with a bipolar Indo-Pacific in a bipolar world. Choosing between Washington and Beijing would not be an optimal scenario for New Delhi: As the least powerful of the three states, India would be choosing between declining global hegemony and rising continental hegemony. One strategy to overcome this dilemma is hedging, which is a rational response to power transition and strategic uncertainty.

In the Quadrilateral Initiative (the Quad), India is collaborating intensely with USA, Australia, and Japan. Like India, they are maritime democracies in the Indo-Pacific; unlike India, they are formally allies. But India is also firmly in the BRICS grouping with Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa to

## India's Options in a Bipolar Indo-Pacific

	<i>Active Strategy</i>	<i>Passive Strategy</i>
<i>Involved in power politics</i>	Balancing (Against China; hence an anti-China strategy)	Bandwagoning (With China; hence an anti-U.S. strategy)
<i>Not involved in power politics</i>	Transcending (Building cooperative security in Asia)	Hiding (Non-alignment – neither balancing nor bandwagoning)

bring much-needed changes in core issues of global governance. The five BRICS countries are contra-hegemonic and revisionist to different degrees, but here again India stands apart. While China, Russia, and Brazil seek the rapid relative decline of the U.S., India would be unwilling to swap US global hegemony for Chinese continental hegemony. This is a classic example of hedging: the Quad for India's geostrategic interests, BRICS for its global governance concerns.

A new non-alignment would be difficult because one of the polar powers (China) would be a neighbor with which India shares a long and unresolved border. Fence sitting would be difficult because India, although not a polar power like China and USA, would also have the system-shaping capabilities and intentions of a great power. Alternately, India could pursue a *transcending* strategy that seeks to build cooperative security in the Indo-Pacific over a ten-to-fifteen-year time horizon. Since this would be the period in which its capabilities would begin to decline *in relative terms*, it would be an opportune moment for the U.S. to get enmeshed in this Asian Helsinki process. By building robust political and economic links with both China and the U.S., India could play an important catalytic role in constructing cooperative security in the Indo-Pacific.

# If You're Not Against Them, Are You with Them?

## South Africa, Active Non-Alignment and the War in Ukraine



**Elizabeth Sidiropoulos**

National Director, South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), Johannesburg



**Steven Gruzd**

Head of the African Governance and Diplomacy Program  
Head of the Russia-Africa Project at SAIIA

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 will probably be remembered as the moment when the post-Cold War order ended and the dissonance over the future form of the international order between the Global North and the Global South became more apparent. For the West, the invasion called for a straightforward response to a clear violation of international law. For many countries in the Global South, however, this was a clash between the West and Russia, which had been brewing for many years and which had now come to a head. And how was Russia's behavior different from that of the U.S. in Iraq or Afghanistan or Libya?

Ukraine was the theater of a war fought between the West and Russia – the former with economic sanctions, the latter through conventional military means in Ukraine, but also through economic blackmail in food and energy access. Remembering the Cold War divisions, many countries in the developing world preferred to remain neutral in this conflict, and the notion of non-alignment came back to the fore.

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has emphasized its independent foreign policy, its commitment to a reformed type of multilateralism, and its identity as a member of the Global South. Its

espoused neutrality over Russia's invasion of Ukraine surprised many Western countries, who believed that South Africa's liberal democracy and commitment to a rules-based multilateral order meant that it would condemn the Russian invasion unequivocally and side with the West. South Africa's stance was also a severe blow to the argument that the war in Ukraine had brought to the fore the cleavage between democracy and authoritarianism as the main division in world affairs.

Instead, at a time when in Latin America the notion of Active Non-Alignment has gained traction, the invasion has rekindled the concept of non-alignment, which after the end of the Cold War had lost much of its momentum and *raison d'être*.<sup>1</sup> South Africa has a long tradition of embracing non-alignment. The African National Congress' commitment to non-alignment was part of its history. It was present at the Bandung Conference in 1955, where it was granted observer status. In May 1994, weeks after the first democratic election, South Africa joined the Non-Aligned Movement, and in September 1998, the country hosted the Non-Aligned Summit in Durban, with Nelson Mandela occupying center stage, and the attendance of leaders such as Fidel Castro, Yasser Arafat, Robert Mugabe, and Muhammad Abu Gaddafi.

In the months-long build-up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the South African government was largely silent on the matter. There are certain causes that are very close to South Africa's heart, such as the Western Sahara issue or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where its position is always clear and unambiguous. On other matters, Pretoria has preferred to emphasize peaceful settlement, use of multilateral rather than unilateral solutions, or in some instances to remain silent.

Overall, the country has cultivated diplomatic and economic relations with both the North and the South while affirming its Southern and African identity.

With the hostilities in their fourth month and no sign of abating soon, South Africa's posture towards this conflict has evolved, but its purported neutrality and "strategic non-alignment" have not always been clear and some of its actions have created perceptions that it is in the Russian camp. The South African government's first major statement on the looming conflict was issued by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) on February 23, the day before Russia attacked its neighbor. South Africa expressed concern about the situation at the border,

<sup>1</sup> Carlos Fortín, Jorge Heine, and Carlos Ominami (eds.). *El No Alineamiento Activo y América Latina: una doctrina para el nuevo siglo* (Santiago, Chile: Catalonia, 2021).

and “urge[d] all parties to devote increased efforts to diplomacy and to find a solution that will help de-escalate tensions and avert armed conflict.” It called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to play a key role in the search for a peaceful solution and lead inclusive peace talks.

Early the next morning, Russian forces crossed the border in a blitzkrieg attack. A second DIRCO statement on February 24 expressed South Africa’s “dismay” and that it “regretted” the deterioration of the situation and the failure of diplomacy. It also plainly pointed the finger at Moscow: “South Africa calls on Russia to immediately withdraw its forces from Ukraine in line with the United Nations Charter...South Africa emphasizes respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.” It again called on “all parties” to seek solutions to end the hostilities and uphold international law.

That evening, senior government figures attended a reception hosted by the Russian Embassy in Pretoria to celebrate three decades of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Clinking champagne glasses did not make for good press, and opposition parties slammed this insensitivity.

The “naming and shaming” of Russia on February 24 was to prove an anomaly in South Africa’s official statements on the Ukraine conflict. President Cyril Ramaphosa was reportedly furious with Dr. Naledi Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, for singling out Russia by name. In his subsequent statements, the President refused to condemn Russia, and later went on to blame the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for provoking this conflict due to its relentless eastward expansion.

At the UN General Assembly (UNGA) special emergency session on March 1, South Africa abstained on a resolution condemning Russia. Africa was split down the middle, with 27 states voting for the resolution, one voting against (Eritrea) and the rest either abstaining or absent from the vote. All the Southern African states run by former liberation movements abstained. South Africa’s explanation of its vote in UNGA highlighted the absence of a real attempt to bring the two sides to dialogue. It argued that this resolution would drive a deeper wedge between the parties.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, South Africa believed that the UN should be used as a “platform to build bridges” and de-escalate tensions, something that the resolution failed to do.

In an opinion piece, DIRCO’s Head of Public Diplomacy Clayson Monyela in *The Daily Maverick* on March 11 wrote: “Had NATO given Russia the security

<sup>2</sup> “South Africa’s Statement in Explanation of Vote on Ukraine in the UN General Assembly Emergency Special Session,” DIRCO, March 2, 2022, <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2022/unga0302.htm>.

assurances they required and been promised since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the region would not likely find itself in the situation it is currently in.” He added, “In keeping with our independent foreign policy, we have adopted a non-aligned position and sought to discourage a war in which the chief protagonists are essentially the big powers, with the people of Ukraine being on the receiving end of post-Cold War disagreements on what would constitute a safer Europe and Russia.”

Media commentary and public sentiment in South Africa have been sharply divided, with a fair amount of sympathy and support for Russia, stemming from Soviet-era solidarity, BRICS ties, financial support of the African National Congress (ANC) and accusations of hypocrisy about when force is justified, as seen from Western interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, among others.

The South African government seemed to tie itself in knots not to blame Russia. This was seen most starkly in a draft resolution it put forward in the UNGA on humanitarian corridors in Ukraine on March 24, which failed to even mention Russia and was widely rejected as being pro-Russian, severely denting South Africa’s image as a neutral broker. Western powers clearly saw this as Pretoria being in Moscow’s camp even though South Africa emphasized that dealing with the humanitarian crisis should be the priority, rather than stoking political divisions.<sup>3</sup>

South Africa also abstained on a subsequent resolution in April to expel Russia from the United Nations Human Rights Council. In that resolution, however, the number of African countries that abstained from voting was 23; only 10 voted in favor of Russia’s suspension, nine against and eight were not present. However, the media statement issued by Minister Naledi Pandor on April 8, 2022 following the adoption of the resolution suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council, illustrated a shift in South Africa’s narrative on how it understood the situation in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> The statement emphasized that the South African government was not indifferent to what was happening in Ukraine and was “deeply concerned about the continuing conflict, the loss of lives and the deteriorating humanitarian situation.” It supported “dialogue, mediation and diplomacy [as] the only path to end the current conflict.” This required the immediate cessation of hostilities to enable “a comprehensive response to the humanitarian crisis.” It mentioned specifically that “the Russian Federation used force without sanction by the UN Security Council in Ukraine.”<sup>5</sup>

3 UN, “General Assembly Adopts Text Recognizing Scale of Humanitarian Woes Arising from Russian Federation’s Ukraine Offensive as Unseen in Many Decades,” United Nations, March 24, 2022, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/ga12411.doc.htm>.

4 “Statement by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, during the Media Briefing on the Russia / Ukraine Conflict,” DIRCO, April 8, 2022, <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2022/pandor0408.htm>.

5 Ibid.

The Minister described this event as a “tectonic” shift in global affairs resulting in a shift away from the UNSC, the premier organ of the UN on international peace and security issues, to the use of United Nations General Assembly votes. “Global power relations are being realigned in response to the war” and the resultant volatility in the global economy has “a direct impact on South Africa and the developing world.”<sup>6</sup>

In this respect, South Africa, along with other members of the Global South, resist “becoming embroiled in the politics of confrontation and aggression that has been advocated by the powerful countries,” are seeking to “assert their independent, non-aligned views” and wish to promote “peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and negotiation” in keeping with the approach of the Non-Aligned Movement that recognizes the right of maintaining independent foreign policies.<sup>7</sup> However, “our non-aligned position does not mean that we condone Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine, which has violated international law”[...] South Africa has always opposed violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, in keeping with the UN Charter.”<sup>8</sup>

More recently, speaking in Parliament during her budget vote in May 2022, Dr. Pandor said that South Africa would “give greater attention to member states of the Non-Aligned Movement and work with them to ensure that we all actively contribute to shaping the reform deliberations with the United Nations system, as well as giving new content to the United Nations Security Council.”<sup>9</sup>

The war in Ukraine is clearly a moment of reflection among developing countries about how they will position themselves in a more geopolitically polarized world, where their economic and developmental interests are impacted negatively by great power rivalries. They have recognized the moment and their desire for strategic non-alignment in the case of South Africa has manifested itself in a number of ways, not all of them necessarily “non-aligned”:

- South Africa has not imposed sanctions against Russia, although it is compelled to comply with them.
- Its narrative at the UN has been to focus on ways of bringing the parties to negotiating table and creating de-escalation paths, although in doing so, it has been seen to be more aligned with

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 “Speech by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, on the Occasion of the Budget Vote,” DIRCO, May 12, 2022, <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2022/pand0512.htm>.

Russia's position and thus not non-aligned.

- It has been averse to the use by the great powers of the UN as a platform for political point scoring and has used the crisis to re-assert the need for UN reform as the UN and the Security Council in particular have been disappointing in their handling of the crisis.
- South Africa has also recognized the necessity of greater economic self-sufficiency for Africa, especially in food security, as an outcome of the Ukraine crisis, but also as a result of the supply chain disruptions brought on by the pandemic.

However, South Africa has also recognized the importance of calling out Russia's violation of the UN Charter, while not unconditionally accepting the Western narrative. The reality is that the reform of the UN may not be enough to overcome polarization or the realpolitik calculations of great powers. Strategic non-alignment should also not be based on "what-aboutism," in other words, the U.S. has done the same in Iraq or Libya, but it should call out double standards and treat those who violate international law in the same way.

Rebuilding non-alignment in a polarized world, in a way that does not compromise the national interests of the Global South, will be one of the major undertakings and challenges of the next few years. For countries like South Africa, the most important priorities are to ensure a fairer multilateral system in which it can achieve its developmental objectives. Falling prey to geopolitical rivalries is not in its interests. Building coalitions of countries in order to drive certain processes and stand up to great powers will be critical if a new form of strategic non-alignment that renders economic and developmental benefits is to be realized.

# Argentina's "Third Way" and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Esteban Actis



Lecturer, Universidad Nacional del Rosario, Rosario, Argentina

Co-Author,

*La disputa por el poder global:*

*China contra Estados Unidos en la crisis de la pandemia*

The current international order is characterized by the "return of history," that is, by the return of great power competition. The relative decline of US power and the rise in the material capabilities of China lead to an inevitable conflict. The geopolitical dynamics that operated at the margins of the post-Cold War order occupies today's center stage, in a highly globalized and interdependent system. While the logic of geopolitics implies a rigid zero-sum game for all, the logic of interdependence relies on a variable-sum game where flexibility and diversification prevail.

It is in this context that the international strategies of peripheral countries in general, and of Latin America in particular, operate. While the hegemonic power demands commitments on the strategic, geopolitical front, countries in the region are keen to expand and to diversify their economic and trade ties with the Global South.

Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine on February 24, 2022, had a systemic impact on international relations. No one could be indifferent to a conflict that by the end of 2021 seemed inevitable. The unexpected military resistance of Ukraine and the equally unexpected resilience of Russia in the face of unprecedented Western economic and financial sanctions extended a conflict that has already lasted more than 100 days.

How Argentina has handled the foreign policy and diplomatic challenges arising from the war in Ukraine constitutes a fascinating case study of the dilemmas faced by developing nations in this setting of great power competition.

One of Latin America's largest economies, a member of the G20, and a country where its foreign policy orientation has tended to veer from militant Third Worldism to resolute pro-U.S. stances, and back, in the past four decades, the current time has been particularly testing for the conduct of Argentine foreign relations. Its precarious financial position and huge foreign debt makes it especially vulnerable to US pressures and those of the Bretton Woods institutions. In turn, its trade and investment ties with China, as well as the support it received from Russia's "vaccine diplomacy" at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, at a time of raging "vaccine nationalism" in the West, mean it is fully conscious of the benefits that derive from a diversified set of foreign economic and diplomatic relations.

In this context, the way the government of President Alberto Fernández has managed this challenge provides valuable insights into what the doctrine of Active Non-Alignment is all about and why it provides us with a useful handle to understand Latin America's relations with the rest of the world today.

To understand the dynamics of Argentine foreign policy - before and during the conflict - three key aspects must be considered: the Peronist foreign policy tradition; the vulnerabilities imposed by Argentina's foreign debt; and the extant divisions in the ruling coalition, the Front of All.

From the very beginning, the Peronist movement was marked by the notion of the "third position." According to it, Argentina should have an autonomous foreign policy and aim to increase its margin of maneuver abroad, so as not to fall prey to the whims of the great powers. That political tradition, which has once again come to the fore with the return of Peronism to power in 2019, has gained new currency with the notions of Active Non-Alignment and Diplomacy of Equidistance. These notions have acquired new currency as a result of the U.S.-China rivalry and an international order tending towards bipolarity. However, the financial vulnerability of Argentina and the internal divisions in the ruling coalition have led to inconsistency and ambivalence in the execution of this foreign policy.

By the end of 2021, Argentina was finalizing talks to renegotiate the agreement signed in 2018 by then President Mauricio Macri with the International Monetary Fund. The IMF had lent a record \$44 billion to Argentina, part of which had to be repaid in 2022. After renegotiating the debt with private creditors, the government of Alberto Fernández needed to reschedule its debt payments to the IMF.

Given the need for Washington's support in the tough negotiations with the IMF, the Argentine government acted accordingly. The visits of Jake Sullivan (National Security Advisor) and Juan González (Director for Latin America in the White House's National Security Council) to Buenos Aires and the visits of Secretary of Strategic Affairs Gustavo Béliz and of Representative Sergio Massa to Washington (both with many contacts in the US capital) were part of this strategy. This was followed by efforts to secure a bilateral meeting between Joe Biden and Alberto Fernández at the COP in Glasgow, by the participation of Argentina in the Democracy Summit held in Washington DC in December 2021, and by the visit to Washington of Foreign Minister Santiago Cafiero in January 2022 to meet with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, as he sought political support for the agreement with the IMF.

On January 28, 2022, President Alberto Fernández announced a political understanding with the IMF on Argentina's debt rescheduling. This agreement was rejected by Vice President (and former President) Cristina Kirchner and her political followers, on the strength of the argument that it meant more hardship and belt-tightening for Argentinians, given the economic adjustment it entailed for an already weakened and battered economy. Three days later, Máximo Kirchner, the son of Vice President Cristina Kirchner, and leader of the ruling coalition's parliamentary group, broke with the latter.

In this context, in early February, President Alberto Fernández undertook state visits to Russia and China, with bilateral meetings with Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. At the time, a war between Russia and Ukraine was imminent. In turn, in the context of the political boycott of the Winter Olympics held in China, President Alberto Fernández was present at the opening ceremony of the Games. Only Argentina and half a dozen other countries were present both at the Summit for Democracy in Washington in December and at the opening of the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing in February.

On February 3, Alberto Fernández met with Vladimir Putin. A day later, the Russian President had a bilateral meeting with Xi Jinping and signed a joint, 5000-word statement on China-Russia collaboration. On February 6, the President of Argentina held a meeting with his Chinese counterpart. The succession of events - especially after seeing how events unfolded - showed Argentina was close to the Moscow-Beijing axis.

Fernández's visit to Russia had two purposes. It expressed Argentina's appreciation to Moscow for sharing the Sputnik V, an anti-Covid-19 vaccine, at

a time when Argentina had no access to other vaccines. It also aimed to secure Russia's support for an increase in IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDR) to Argentina. If Fernández's visits to Moscow and Beijing at such sensitive moments raised eyebrows in the West, his fiery rhetoric in his meeting with Putin didn't help. The speech was highly critical of the US role in Latin America and concluded with the invitation for "Argentina to be Russia's gateway to the region."

The President's statements were directed at a domestic audience, and particularly at the faction of the ruling coalition that objected to Argentina's agreement with the IMF. Ties with Moscow and Beijing are fostered especially by supporters of Vice President Cristina Kirchner. The Ambassador in Moscow, Eduardo Zuain, and the Ambassador in Beijing, Sabino Vaca Narvaja, are part of Mrs. Kirchner's inner circle. In that sector, anti-U.S. sentiment reigns.

In turn, during Fernández's visit to Beijing, Argentina signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Although 19 Latin American countries had already done so, Argentina's signing onto China's flagship foreign policy project means that the country is the largest economy in Latin America to join BRI. Fernández also returned to Buenos Aires with a \$24 billion Chinese investment package for Argentina, including a project for a nuclear energy plant, among others.

A few days after Alberto Fernández's visit to Moscow, Russia invaded Ukraine. Western countries considered this an inadmissible act against the existing international order. Since then, the West has tried to isolate Moscow politically and economically.

For Buenos Aires, the war was a problem. It forced the government to take a stance on a thorny issue. After initial statements condemning the war that did not even mention Russia (leading to strong objections from the Ukrainian Embassy), Argentina quickly aligned its discourse and diplomatic action with the United States, although subtle differences between the presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to surface. The vote condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the United Nations General Assembly was followed by another in favor of suspending Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council. This was proof positive of the "limited opposition" concept coined by Roberto Russell and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian: disagreements with Washington on political and economic matters are acceptable, but on hemispheric and global strategic issues, they are not.

Argentina's support for the US position on the war in Ukraine was not unconditional. Argentina rejected the use of economic sanctions against Moscow, as well as the attempt to expel Russia from the G20. However, Argentina continued to hew Washington's line on other issues. The April visit to Argentina of General Laura Richardson, the Chief of the US Southern Command ("SouthComm"), a vocal critic of what in the United States is referred to as "the role of external powers in Latin America," and the signing with 60 other democracies of the "Declaration for the Future of the Internet" are expressions of that. Only five Latin American countries - Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru and Uruguay - signed the latter, an initiative of the Biden administration that seeks to compete with China in shaping the future of the web.

The deterioration of international economic conditions - despite higher revenues from commodity exports - had an impact on the adjustment program, retrenchment goals and debt repayment schedule set by Argentina with the IMF. The government will need a US waiver for approval of its IMF debt repayment schedule in the second half of 2022, and once again the White House will be key to that end. Likewise, Argentina must secure loans (in the range of 4 billion dollars) from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, which will be vital to alleviating the lack of foreign currency in the second half of 2022, loans on which the U.S. will have a say.

That said, the prolongation of the war and its impact on food and energy prices has also enhanced Argentina's standing within emerging markets. The invitation for Alberto Fernández to participate in the BRICS Summit (Argentina is negotiating its accession as a member of the group) hosted by China and held virtually in July is one indicator. Another is the invitation for him to participate in the G7 meeting in the German Alps a few days later. With Argentina having a place at the table in two of the leading groups that deal with global economic governance issues, one from the Global South, and the other from the Global North, the country has an extraordinary opportunity to ratchet up its diplomatic game and make the most of the privileged position provided by its enormous natural resources.

Yet, if the financial vulnerability that affects Argentina is exacerbated, and the factionalism that plagues the ruling coalition is amplified, it will be difficult for Argentina to continue with the delicate and complex game of Active Non-Alignment that it has played not without dexterity in the first half of 2022. In the context of the war in Ukraine and great power competition, the risk for Buenos Aires is that its strategy becomes an "inconsistent" equidistance.

# ASEAN and Ukraine: Non-Alignment via Multi-Alignment?



## Cheng-Chwee Kuik

Professor, Universiti Kebangsaan  
(National University of) Malaysia (UKM)  
Non-Resident Fellow, The Foreign Policy  
Institute,  
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced  
International Studies,  
Johns Hopkins University



## Paul Evans

HSBC Chair in Asian Research,  
University of British Columbia  
Pok Rafeah Chair, Institute of Malaysian  
and International Studies (IKMAS), UKM

The devastation resulting from the ongoing war in Ukraine continues to spread. Coming on the heels of the COVID pandemic and a downward spiral in U.S.-China relations, the conflict is a human tragedy. It has thrown into stark relief existing geo-political tensions, the variance in national responses, and different visions of security structures for an era of radical uncertainty.

Russia's blatant invasion and the brutality of the conflict are unquestionable. What surprises is the variation in responses. The unity in NATO and among US allies has taken form in a chorus of condemnation, massive military, diplomatic and economic support for the Zelensky government, and a series of sanctions against Russia.

Yet governments in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, while usually expressing alarm and abhorrence, have been far less willing to participate in the sanctions or support the Western narrative on the causes of the war.

Far more so than at the outbreak of the Cold War in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the list is lengthy of countries unpersuaded by the US and European calls to arms and strengthened alliances or for framing this as a battle between democracy and autocracy. Despite sharp differences, neither India nor China is lining up with the West. Most others in the developing world along with a sizeable list of middle-income countries aren't either.

This time round, *The Rest* matter a great deal more in terms of population,

economic weight, and diplomatic capability.

The members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are emblematic of the new forces in play and the actions of regional states that must make choices but deplore being forced to choose. Their key ideas and responses - pledging and pursuing “non-alignment” by actively practicing inclusive, impartial “multi-alignment” - deserve careful attention.

Diverse in political systems, level of economic development, languages, religions, and histories, they have an institutional bond in ASEAN built upon norms and practices that have special value in an era of great power rivalries and turbulence. Committed to globalization, principles of comprehensive and cooperative security, and the virtues of inclusive multilateral processes, they are a useful vantage point on the Ukraine crisis and navigating an unstable security order.

## **ASEAN Reactions**

ASEAN’s ten members have responded to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in diverse and often contradictory ways. Singapore condemned and imposed sanctions on Russia; Myanmar’s military junta endorsed the Kremlin’s actions; Indonesia condemned the violation of sovereignty but without mentioning Russia by name and without implementing sanctions. In March, all ASEAN states except Laos and Vietnam voted at the UN General Assembly to deplore Russia’s aggression. In April, six ASEAN members abstained from voting to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, while Laos and Vietnam opposed the resolution, and the Philippines and the Myanmar government-in-exile supported it.

The regional commonalities are instructive. Nearly all have avoided siding with any power, emphasized their “neutrality, and positioned to keep options open.” Indonesia, the host of the upcoming G20 Summit in Bali, has resisted pressure from Western countries to exclude Russia from the meeting, instead, inviting both presidents Putin and Zelensky. Singapore, despite being the only ASEAN state condemning the invasion and imposing unilateral sanctions on Russia, opted to abstain from the Human Rights Council vote. Voices region-wide decry “double standards” in the West’s neglect of earlier conflicts and refugee crises elsewhere.

The ASEAN reactions to the war are not fundamentally because of feelings of hypocrisy or the view that it is a distant European conflict, not its own. At root is an abiding prudence about offsetting risks and avoiding being pulled into a

permanent alignment with any major power. It is systemic risks that are of the greatest concern to security and stability and regional cohesion in a neighborhood that was long a battleground of external imperial powers.

Historical memory matters. As smaller actors suffered from centuries-long Western colonialism and decades-long Cold War politics, Southeast Asian countries see the present-day U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China rivalries as more a matter of big-power competition than an issue of ideological contestation. The fight in Ukraine is chiefly a proxy war between the major powers.

The Russia-Ukraine War is unfolding as U.S.-China rivalry is intensifying on multiple fronts. There is alarm about potential polarization and the erosion of ASEAN centrality in mitigating tensions in the broader Asia-Pacific world. There is apprehension about the expanding Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) cooperation, as well as the announcement of AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States) security agreement in September 2021. And there is resistance to defining the strategic setting as a grand competition between democracies and autocracies with a guiding principle of cooperation among the idea of “like-minded” defined on the basis of regime type.

## **Alliances or Alignments?**

ASEAN states see eye-to-eye with the West about the crucial importance of upholding national sovereignty and territorial integrity. But they do not think collective-defense alliances and exclusive alignments are the solutions.

In Europe, Finland and Sweden’s bids to join NATO signify that alliance now trumps neutrality as the path to smaller-state survival. These decisions are driven by two factors - the threat from Russia is becoming more profound and direct, and support from a U.S.-led NATO is immediately available, credible, and reliable.

In Southeast Asia, the sources of threats are less-than-clear-cut, and allied support, less-than-certain. China has been a source of growing security concern, especially to those Southeast Asian claimants and littoral states in the South China Sea, increasingly worried by Beijing’s growing maritime assertiveness. At the same time, however, China is a huge regional presence and indispensable economic and diplomatic partner for Southeast Asian governments generally occupied with tackling more pressing domestic challenges and non-traditional security problems in post-COVID-19 economy and society.

Part of the strategic logic is the danger of a self-fulfilling prophecy: actively and overtly forming an exclusive alignment targeting a perceived China threat will turn a security concern into an immediate and greater threat. Action-reaction countermeasures will provoke China to act more aggressively.

Hence, while ASEAN states are deeply concerned about the dangerous precedent set by Russia, they have generally avoided joining the West in taking a united and strong position against Moscow.

This combines with a resistance to full alignment with the United States. America's Indo-Pacific strategy, while welcome, is widely seen as focusing too heavily on military and defense issues and insufficiently on development and functional cooperation, giving uneven attention to all ASEAN members, and hobbled by uncertainty about domestic instability and the prospect of more policy reversals to come, the shadow of Trump.

ASEAN states, hence, have been pledging "non-alignment" as seen in Vietnam's "Four No's" policy in its 2019 Defense White Paper, and Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto's emphasis on "non-alignment" at this year's Shangri-La Dialogue. This pledge, however, has gone hand-in-hand with an actual practice of "multilayered alignments," where virtually all ASEAN states pursue a complex blend of cooperative arrangements with multiple partners in areas of defense, diplomacy, and development.

This practice has deepened and widened in recent years, in large part driven by growing big-power tensions externally and elite political needs internally. Region-wide ruling elites rely heavily on development-based performance legitimacy to govern. This motivates them to pursue as many concrete, productive partnerships across key domains with as many key powers as possible.

## **Non-Alignment and Neutralism: Then and Now**

"Neutrality" was a core foundation, if contested, when ASEAN issued the declaration of The Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971. Then debates centered on distinctions between "neutrality" (non-involvement by a state in a war between other states) and "neutralization" (the way in which neutrality is attained) in legal terms and mainly in wartime situations. "Neutralism" was framed as the peacetime foreign policy approach of a state, either alone or in concert with others. Adopted by many newly independent states, neutralism was

often associated with impartiality and non-alignment with the blocs led by either the United States or the Soviet Union. “Non-alignment,” in turn, was equated with “non-alliance” during much of the Cold War period.

In the early 1990s, several states in formal alliances joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Thailand and the Philippines, the two treaty allies of the United States in Southeast Asia, joined NAM in 1993, following the footsteps of other Southeast Asian states. The terms “non-alliance” and “non-alignment” were no longer co-terminus. Here, “non-alignment” is used to refer to membership in NAM or the declared principle of impartiality vis-à-vis the competing powers, whereas “non-alliance” to a decision of not joining formal alliances (i.e., military cooperation between sovereign states that entails mutual defense commitment).

Alignment in today’s Southeast Asia is more flexible, multifaceted, supported by institutionalized consultative processes, and sustained by continuous dialogue and policy coordination, both bilaterally and multilaterally, including such ASEAN-led mechanisms as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Plus Three, the East Asia Summit, and the ADMM+ (ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting) process.

To align, in its simplest terms, means to come together, to work with each other, to link oneself to larger collective efforts of coordinating actions and pursuing common aims. It is more than a dialogue or routine interaction. It involves coordinated actions and concerted efforts for a continuous harmonization of wider ends.

Alignments are different from alliances that entail a mutual defense commitment, a bond with a single great-power patron, and often a targeted source of threat. Alignments allow room for simultaneous and selective cooperation with *multiple* partners and even with *both* competing powers. This applies for those not in any formal alliances but also for treaty allies. Thailand forged strategic alignment with China in the late 1970s that have been revived in recent decades. The Philippines has an alliance with the United States as the cornerstone of its external policy while developing defense cooperation with China and expanding its strategic ties with Australia, Japan, and India.

Other original members of ASEAN have maintained longstanding and robust defense and security partnerships with outside powers. Malaysia and Singapore continue to commit to the Five Power Defense Arrangements involving the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Singapore’s alignment with the United States is the most robust security partnership between an ASEAN state and an

outside power.

As the U.S.-China rivalry intensifies and uncertainty grows, more ASEAN states have developed additional layers of alignment with a wider range of countries. Indonesia and Malaysia, both critical of AUKUS, have quietly pursued strategic diversification. Malaysia has entered into more defense MoUs than ever before (including an upcoming one with the United States). Indonesia has launched 2+2 mechanisms with several Western and Asian powers while broadening its long-held defense partnership with the United States. Vietnam has pursued similar multilayered partnerships with various outside powers, developing defense ties and cultivating multi-domain cooperation, mainly bilaterally.

Co-eval is the expansion of cooperative ties with China that go well beyond trade and investment. Virtually all are partners in BRI-related infrastructure and connectivity-building ventures. Many conduct military exercises and buy arms from China. And several do joint river patrols with China.

For now, ASEAN's inclusive multilayered alignments are more about mitigating and offsetting multiple risks than counter-balancing any specific threat. Hedging against risks amid uncertainty, the greater the uncertainty, the greater the scope and scale of alignments.

## **Where Active Non-Alignment Meets Inclusive Multi-Alignment**

The idea of "Active Non-Alignment" being developed by Latin American thought leaders resonates with the outlook and practices of ASEAN states' resistance to lining up unequivocally with either the United States or China, valuing deepened relations with both, wary of formalized alliances along the lines of NATO, and interested in maintaining an open global trading system in the face of calls for economic decoupling and new forms of protectionism.

For Middle Powers in the West like Canada, Australia and New Zealand which favor multilateral institutions (inclusive and selective), which champion "universal" values including freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and which have deep security and economic ties with the United States, non-alignment and neutrality are non-starters.

But as the balance of power continues to shift, as most of the developing world

steadily moves toward strategic recalibrations, and as fears of a two-bloc world and intensifying U.S.-China rivalry deepen, both ASEAN-style approaches and Latin American thinking need fresh attention.

Both are about avoiding speculation on the future big-power relations and avoiding antagonism with either side. Both are about actively creating layers of collaboration, cultivating channels of communication, and keeping bridges of respectful coexistence open for all even when the space for maneuver is shrinking.

Strategic positioning is dynamic. An escalation of the conflict in Europe, a direct U.S.-China military clash, or Putin-style territorial aggression in Asia, could alter thinking quickly. But for the moment, Southeast Asia's multilayered-alignments through bilateral efforts and the web of ASEAN-centered arrangements are the functioning foundations for regional peace and prosperity.

# Back to the Future? India's Stance on the War in Ukraine



**Hari Seshasayee**

Global Fellow, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
Trade Advisor to the Colombian Government

The argument that “you are either with us, or against us” has been repeated throughout history. It is found in religious texts like the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament; in literary works like George Orwell’s *Pacifism and the War* and Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*; by numerous leaders and politicians, from Vladimir Lenin and Benito Mussolini to George W. Bush; and even in film franchises like *Beauty and the Beast*, *Star Wars* and *X-Men*.

Yet, as imperious as it may seem, this argument is often a false dichotomy – one that artificially limits the options available to just two sides, when there could be more options. This certainly seems to be the view of India’s Foreign Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine. At a recent conference in Europe, he asserted, “just because I don’t agree with you, doesn’t mean I’m sitting on the fence; I’m sitting on my ground...Europe has to grow up out of the mindset that Europe’s problems are the world’s problems, but the world’s problems are not Europe’s problems.”

Some have perceived India’s position as one of neutrality, particularly because New Delhi has not condemned Russia. Neutrality during moral crises often has a negative connotation. Dante Alighieri condemns neutral angels and humans to the “entrance-hall” of Hell; Martin Luther King Jr. echoed this sentiment while opining about the Vietnam War, “that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a period of moral crisis maintain their neutrality,” and even Archbishop Desmond Tutu opined that in the case of Apartheid South Africa, “if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

This partially explains the level of censure that India has faced for its present stance on the war in Ukraine. Not only did many in the West rebuke India; one high-level United States official even warned that India would have to face certain “consequences” if it continued doing business with Russia despite US sanctions. Others have questioned why India has not condemned flagrant violations within a country’s sovereign borders, given its own experience with territorial disputes and wars.

Still, it may be worth remembering that positions of morality – specifically one with international actors – evolve over time. In the case of Ukraine today, the rhetoric of countries today is far more critical towards Russia than when the war initially began. India’s position too, could gradually evolve over time. However, India is not alone: a sizeable portion of the world is reluctant to take a firm stance against Russia, and tellingly, as many as 35 countries abstained in a UN vote on March 2, 2022, to condemn Russia for attacking Ukraine.

## **New Delhi’s Positions on Russia and the Far-Reaching Impacts of the War**

Russia did, in fact, *invade* Ukraine in an act of unprovoked aggression. Such violence against sovereign states should not be acceptable in a post-colonial world.

So, why then has India not been swift in condemning Russia?

Perhaps the best way to approach this answer is to look at it through the lens of time:

- 1 The past:** India has enjoyed a close, strategic partnership with Russia and the erstwhile Soviet Union. The Soviet Union supported India during some wars and armed conflicts, particularly by providing India with MiG fighter-aircrafts during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. At the same time, the U.S. often sided with Pakistan. India also received significant support on the nuclear front in the 1980s to construct “two 1,000-MW light-water reactors and provide enriched uranium fuel for the reactors’ entire operational life,” in addition to leasing a nuclear-powered submarine. Consequently, the Soviet Union became one of independent India’s most important allies, and its successor, Russia, transitioned into a similar role.
- 2 The present:** Whether or not policymakers in India and abroad like it, India’s dependence on Russian arms today is indubitable. About 62% of India’s arms imports since 2010 come from Russia. More importantly, the vast majority

of the current inventory of military hardware, aircrafts, ships, tanks and weapons systems used by India's army, navy and air force are of Russian origin, and depend on Russia for spare parts and servicing. Additionally, India relies on Russian support to run some nuclear energy plants, and imports a reasonable amount of fossil fuels, specifically oil and coal.

- 3 **The future:** This specific element has been absent in most analyses of India's position on the war in Ukraine: how does India view its relationship with Russia in the future, and more importantly, a more distant, post-Putin future? The answer lies partially in being able to depend on Russia as a source of affordable arms and energy supply, but more importantly, New Delhi does not want to risk alienating Russia due to its close ties to China. Surely, India does not want an antagonistic relationship with both China and Russia in the future. Western sanctions on Russia have illustrated the vulnerability of "the Rest" in a US dollar-dominated world, and the possibility of a RIC (Russia, India, China) grouping to limit such exposure is not to be dismissed.

Although New Delhi has not condemned Russia, it has not ignored the conflict altogether. The official statements by India's Foreign Minister and Prime Minister have both emphasized an "immediate cessation of violence and end to all hostilities," adding that "India has always stood for peaceful resolution of issues and direct dialogue between the two parties." India's Prime Minister also called both Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin, twice (in February and March) in a failed attempt to promote dialogue between the two countries.

More recently, however, the language being used by New Delhi has changed, from one of peace and cessation of violence to increasing concern about the global impact of the war on rising food and energy prices, on global value chains as a result of sanctions on Russia, and the disruptions in wheat, vegetable oil and energy markets. In his recent visit to Denmark, India's Prime Minister emphasized the "destabilizing effect of the conflict in Ukraine and its broader regional and global implications."

India continues to engage with Russia and imports modest yet noticeable quantities of oil and coal from Russia. Although this oil is bought at heavy discounts of up to \$40 below Brent prices, India's foreign ministry insists that "energy purchases from Russia remain minuscule in comparison to India's total consumption." India also points to a more urgent reason for continued energy imports from Russia: to reduce the burden on its own people, who are now paying far more at petrol pumps and for staple food like wheat, vegetable oils and cereals.

## Active Non-Alignment vs Strategic Autonomy

The collateral, global impact of the war in Ukraine is palpable in India: petrol prices have reached record highs, and government controls on petroleum prices have resulted in deep losses for publicly owned oil companies. Thus, it is useful to contextualize India's positions through the lens of the concept of Active Non-Alignment (ANA) put forth by Jorge Heine, Carlos Fortín and Carlos Ominami.

Although ANA was initially envisioned for Latin America, it is relevant for understanding India's foreign policy calculations. New Delhi no longer views geopolitics as unipolar; it views the world as multi-polar, and more importantly, believes in "multi-alignment" and "strategic autonomy," an evolution from its historical position as one of the leaders of the non-alignment movement. The approaches outlined by Heine *et al.* in their initial definitions of ANA could also be applied to India: "strengthening regionalism" in South Asia is amongst New Delhi's highest priorities; "reorienting foreign policies" to adapt to a constantly changing, multi-polar world is a constant challenge and objective for India; "new international financial institutions" remain an important pillar of India's geoeconomic policy, illustrated by India's role as a founding member of the New Development Bank; however, India veers away in the last approach to ANA, to keep "an equal distance from both superpowers" (i.e. the U.S. and China), given its participation in the Quad grouping and its increasingly close relationship with Washington.

This also helps explain New Delhi's probable, future positions on the war. For one, New Delhi is highly unlikely to join any war effort, whether in condemnation, with material aid or military supplies: its priority is to safeguard its people from the economic impacts of a protracted war. Unfortunately, despite its sheer size and its great-power aspirations, India has little influence or control in determining the course of this war. Siding squarely with Ukraine and the West will sideline India's most important defense partner, Russia; and overt silence on Russian aggression will disgruntle the West, and particularly India's partners in the Quad. India has little choice but to continue walking this tightrope.

## The Endgame on Sanctions and India's Future Positions in a Multi-Polar World

Looking beyond India's positions on the war, we are left with some important questions regarding its global impacts: How much more will the war, as well as the sanctions on Russia, destabilize global markets? And in the long run, how does one separate the opprobrium against Putin the leader, from Russia the sovereign nation?

Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj and Francisco Rodríguez offer some pragmatic explanations on sanctions, noting that they cause “severe dysfunction by creating acute supply-side disruptions within free markets.” More importantly, Batmanghelidj and Rodríguez suggest four steps that could diminish the impact of sanctions on the global economy: first, sanctions should be targeted at a small set of political elite, not the common people; second, sanctions must shield vulnerable populations, including migrants in Russia, from the fluctuations in foreign currency markets that hamper their saving and spending capacity; third, encourage alternative suppliers to increase exports, while protecting the flow of vital food commodities from Ukraine and Russia to the world; finally, they suggest that “restrictions on international payments systems should be reassessed and circumscribed as much as possible, given the potential knock-on consequences for global economic stability.”

The question of a post-Putin Russia is harder to answer. After all, the world will – at some point in the future – see a post-Putin Russia, and it would be unlikely that Russia remains a pariah even then. Unfortunately, one of the gaping failures of the current world order is that common citizens of Cuba, Iran and North Korea, and now Russia, bear the brunt of international sanctions, even while their regimes continue to remain firmly in power. If sanctions fail to remove the regimes they target, what exactly do they achieve?

Perhaps one final thesis is worth examining at this juncture: What is India’s position in the future of this multi-polar world, specifically one that is led by the U.S. as well as China? We need to look no further than Minister Jaishankar’s remarks at the same European conference: he remarked that India is “a democracy, a market economy, a pluralistic society,” and also a member of the Quad; that should certainly tell us something about the road India is taking.

*(Views expressed in this article are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Colombian government.)*

# The Contemporary Relevance of Non-Alignment

## In the Context of the Russia-Ukraine War

Huang Yunsong



Deputy Dean, School of International Studies, Sichuan University  
Coordinator, China Center for South Asian Studies

Europe, the original locus of the Cold War, is once again the center of bloc confrontation. Washington has vowed to weaken Russia but at the cost of Ukrainian lives and sovereignty. Meanwhile, by employing coercive diplomacy and disinformation, the U.S. and its allies have worked hard to pressure the rest of the world to condemn and sanction Russia. However, many independent-minded countries, like China and India, have stood their ground and illuminated an alternate path.

In only three months, the Russia-Ukraine war has set off a series of global crises, including mass refugee flows and severe supply chain disruptions for food, energy, fertilizers, and more. Crucially, a consensus over the root cause of the tragedy, that would allow space for a widely acceptable and enduring solution, has yet to be reached. Contrary to the official discourse of the U.S. and its allies, conflict was all but inevitable as NATO unrelentingly expanded toward Russia's doorstep. Professor John Mearsheimer, Dr. Henry Kissinger, and former German Chancellor Angela Merkel have shared their previous observation on many occasions. The so-called ambition of Russian President Vladimir Putin to restore the Soviet Union, which US Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed to be the reason for the war, rings hollow, to say the least.

It is absurd to expect the U.S. and its allies, which are currently displaying hot-headed arrogance, to reflect on the unfortunate consequences of NATO's unrelenting expansion. By focusing on fast-tracking the NATO membership applications of Finland and Sweden, the U.S. has confirmed that its geopolitical

objective is to both corner and subdue Russia. An expanded NATO membership can only exacerbate tensions to a point beyond redemption and demonstrates how a strategic alliance can transition into a geopolitical catastrophe. The international community has been taught another hard lesson about the harmful consequences of U.S.-led alliance structures, which, under certain conditions, inflict crippling damages to all stakeholders.

## **A Call for Partnership Without Alliances**

As a leading developing country, China possesses a political and cultural tradition, which encourages friendship rather than enmity. An alliance is usually formed by countries seeking to advance and consolidate their national security interests via the cultivation of long-term political and military relations. However, alliance survival often depends on the identification and targeting of common enemies. According to Chinese wisdom, partnerships between countries should be aimed at enriching cooperation for peaceful development and are reliant on close political and economic ties that require no common enemy. In general, alliances entail elevated risk of mortal confrontation between competing parties, while, in most cases, partnerships foster mutual benefit for those involved.

Over the past four decades, China has entered into partnerships of a varying nature with more than 110 countries. China's proactive partnership policies have enabled a considerable expansion of its circle of friends and created a stable and responsive external environment for its social and economic development. In the absence of such partnership policy, China would surely have not become the largest trading partner of more than 120 countries. Moreover, China's partnership focus has deepened mutual understanding and trust between China and much of the larger world. Indeed, China's approach has provided both opportunities and forums for partners to address differences and misunderstandings in key areas, thus fostering ever more productive relationships.

Standing in stark contrast to China's partnership strategy has been the U.S.-led alliance structure, which has caused Washington to lose international respect and delivered poor geostrategic results. The international community has been both impressed and terrified by America's ruthless overseas military operations and arbitrary economic sanctions against its so-called adversaries.

In the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq invasion, anti-terrorism war in Afghanistan, and military intervention in Syria, the U.S. and its allies have caused humanitarian

crises and failed states *en masse*. In retrospect, it was obvious that the alliances centered on the U.S. and its allies were incapable of meeting the challenges of regional and global security. Far worse, US geopolitical machinations have increased complexity over regional issues such as those in Ukraine and have emerged as a root cause of violent deadlock.

Drawing lessons from the unsuccessful stories of the Western alliances, the developing South has good reasons to opt for a non-alignment policy. Many developing countries, such as Indonesia and Vietnam, have upheld the non-alignment principle as a centerpiece of their foreign policy. China too, has offered sincere appreciation and unconditional support for the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) since the 1960s. Over the course of its integration into the world system, China has developed the doctrine of Partnership without Alliance and enshrined it as a guiding parameter of its foreign policy. Apart from its development-oriented nature, China's Partnership without Alliance doctrine remains essentially in line with the NAM policy.

Concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, it is understood by many observers that NATO expansion has played a catalytic role and those Western sanctions have hindered any move to bring the concerned parties closer to a peaceful solution. Moreover, the U.S. has embarked on a dangerous pattern in the Asia Pacific, which follows the pattern of NATO expansion, in its latest round of Quad and AUKUS alliance efforts targeting China. To ensure the world does not repeat the mistakes of the past, China, as a responsible global power, is obliged to highlight the importance of Partnership without Alliance. China's efforts are not simply about non-alignment and alliance balancing but is about illuminating a path that can safeguard each country's entitlement to peace, development, and prosperity, which is an objective that, so far, the Western practice of alliance building has proved largely futile in achieving.

## **Major Powers' Dislike of Non-Alignment**

Since the 1950s, many developing countries have set out to oppose all forms of dominance and interference by external elements in an effort to avoid power politics and bloc confrontation. A fundamental tenet of the non-aligned countries was to resist great power manipulation, regardless of whether it took the form of an alliance or coercion. Naturally, the non-alignment policy was perceived as troublesome by the United States and the former Soviet Union, because it challenged their strategic calculations to draw much of the world into their orbits.

Established in 1961, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is now the second largest international forum after the United Nations, with 120 member states and 30 observer states and organizations. The non-West grouping of states that gather under the non-aligned banner is primarily tasked with serving the interests of the developing South in terms of security and development. Furthermore, the development of NAM was specifically engineered to resist the hegemonic craving and encroachment maneuvers of the great powers. No major Western power, therefore, has seriously considered either full membership of the movement or even observer status. In other words, non-alignment is genetically incompatible with the major powers in the West.

Sixty years after its birth, the Non-Aligned Movement has lost much of its momentum due to the absence of effective leadership. However, the Russia-Ukraine war has reinvigorated the debate among NAM members about balanced diplomacy and non-alignment. Surprisingly, most of the members were united in their approach to the war. First, they unanimously opposed resorting to war and the violation of sovereign and territorial integrity and reiterated their commitment to the UN Charter and international law. Second, a majority of members rejected alignment, with the U.S. and its allies, in the one-sided accusations and harmful sanctions against Russia. Of the 97 countries that voted against suspending Russia's membership in the United Nations Human Rights Council, almost all were members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In the increasingly fierce confrontation between great powers, the non-aligned are making concerted efforts to prevent the Western monopoly of global political, military, and economic domains. Neither the U.S. nor other great powers expected their minor counterparts to argue against what they perceived as a perilous race to the bottom. Unsurprisingly, the neutral, conscious, and sober stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict by the non-aligned was not well received in the West. In the eyes of the elites from the city upon the hill, the non-aligned response to their crusade against Russia was no less than a veto on the ability of the U.S. and its allies to dictate world events. Thus, the moral sanction of the non-aligned attracted significant opprobrium from the Western powers.

## **Contemporary Relevance of Non-Alignment Policy**

Viewed through the prism of the Russia-Ukraine war, the counterproductive flaws of the Western alliance system and ensuing terrible consequences were vividly exposed to the international community. For Ukraine at least, the conflict and the

role of the U.S.-led alliance system have provided an important lesson about the contemporary relevance of non-alignment policy in an era of uncertainty.

Two takeaways are worthy of special note: First, alliance policy, as practiced by the U.S. and its allies, does not work for all, and is not an effective solution for regional and global security. Former German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who is fully aware of alliance failures, had endeavored to keep Ukraine from joining NATO. Following her retirement, the efforts to secure stability and security for Europe were completely nullified by unseasoned and reckless leaders from both the U.S. and Europe. For Ukraine, putting blind faith in the NATO alliance has proved to be a recipe for disaster. For Europe, playing the alliance expansion card has resulted in collapse of its security framework and indeterminate turmoil. For the international community, the unfolding set of crises resulting from the conflict in Ukraine has inflicted significant damage on both poor countries and their most vulnerable populations.

Second, alliance policy adoption best suits the interests of the manipulators. It has been the U.S. and NATO that have capitalized most on the Russia-Ukraine war. During the conflict, the U.S. took full control over the security architecture of its panicked European allies. Accordingly, the US military-industrial complex is experiencing one of its most profitable eras in both the European and Asia-Pacific markets. Furthermore, Emmanuel Macron's "brain dead" NATO was suddenly reanimated, and now aspires to put China within its purview. In the hierarchical architecture of alliances, those being manipulated are treated as expendable assets.

Careful analysis of Ukraine's tragic journey toward NATO only reinforces doubts about the efficacy of alliance strategy and strengthens the relevance of non-alignment policy in balancing the major powers. For most countries, big or small, it is safe to assume that the adoption of a non-alignment policy can help to guarantee strategic autonomy, bargaining power, and the ability to advance the national interest vis-à-vis the great powers. For the international system, non-alignment policy provides a reliable check on hegemony, liberal or authoritarian, preventing their territorial ambitions and tendency to create battlefields far distant from their own territory.

Together, non-alignment and alliance strategies constitute two sides of the same coin. The Western frenzy for alliance structures is not only detrimental to the vital interests of the Global South, but it necessitates that China, and other like-minded countries, move to revitalize the Non-Aligned Movement.

Youth

Voices



# The Case for a New Non-Alignment Manifesto



**Brian Wong Yueshun**

Ph.D. candidate, Oxford University  
TI Youth Observer

In 1961, when the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was first founded in the then Yugoslavia, the loosely defined alliance of states came together in an attempt to push back against a bifurcated and polarized global order. With the Warsaw Pact on one hand, and NATO on the other, the Cold War came to define the primary bulwark and mantle of the NAM's objectives - for states to collectively resist being incorporated into blocs under Soviet or American-European influence, and for them to work together in advancing an ideologically neutral and practically tenable vision of world peace.

## The Shifting Contexts Underpinning the Non-Aligned Movement

While the powers of small and medium states were fundamentally circumscribed by their far more powerful neighbors, the NAM successfully demonstrated, for the three decades of its interactions with the Cold War, that when smaller non-aligned actors came together to repel pressures for them to take up arms, sides, and ideologically doctrinaire positions, they too, came to cultivate significant political capital. For instance, states with vast populations such as India (under Jawaharlal Nehru) and Yugoslavia (under Josip Tito) pushed back against the pressures from both the Warsaw Pact and NATO to align on proxy and regional conflicts.<sup>1</sup> For Yugoslavia, the split with the Soviet Union, amidst Cold War tensions, allowed it to carve out a distinctive zone of relative neutrality in the Balkans. Both Nehru and Egyptian President

<sup>1</sup> Dhiraj Kumar, "Ukraine Crisis: Nehru's Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Doctrine Beckons India," Times of India Blog, March 4, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/thedhirajkumar-com/ukraine-crisis-nehrus-non-aligned-movement-nam-doctrine-beckons-india/>.

Nasser advocated for “peace” to be achieved through “working for collective security on a world scale and by expanding the region of freedom.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the 1956 Declaration of Brijuni came to be a defining hallmark of the NAM countries’ collective foreign policy – to coordinate, seek, and negotiate an uneasy, yet much-needed peace, amongst their members, large or small.

In the sixty years following the Declaration of Brijuni, the Cold War concluded in 1989 with the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, which brought an end to the ideological Iron Curtain – or so many had thought – dividing the West from the Soviet Union and its remnants. Even in the aftermath of the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine, attempts to draw parallels between the geopolitics of the Cold War and that of today remain overwhelmingly futile. The world is not in a Cold War: for one, there exist multiple poles of competing and collaborating geopolitical interests, and there are more than two clearly equipped powers with divergent yet overlapping worldviews. The extent of economic and financial interdependence between states – notwithstanding the imposition of sanctions by large powers on one another – remains significant and incomparably greater than thirty years ago. Globalization has brought the peoples and civil societies of states closer and facilitated the confluence and synergy in ideologies and values across historically conflictual countries.

The underlying commitments of the NAM remain relevant today. They were the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, encapsulated by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and articulated in a 1954 speech in Sri Lanka by Nehru, which addressed Sino-Indian relations: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in domestic affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.<sup>3</sup>

Such aspirational values are not only worth pushing forward, but are also very much antidotes to the state of global polarization and divisions of today. Yet, precisely because today’s context is so radically different, there must be reforms and adaptations to such principles – in favor of what I shall introduce shortly – as a renewed manifesto for non-alignment.

2 Ki-moon Ban, “Remarks to the High-Level Segment of the 16th Non-Aligned Movement Summit,” United Nation, August 30, 2012, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2012-08-30/remarks-high-level-segment-16th-non-aligned-movement-summit>.

3 “‘Non-Alignment’ Was Coined by Nehru in 1954,” The Times of India, September 18, 2006, <https://timesofindia.india-times.com/india/non-alignment-was-coined-by-nehru-in-1954/articleshow/2000656.cms>.

## Toward a New Ethos of Non-Alignment

Historically, non-alignment had been a pivotal principle ensuring that small and medium powers steered clear of large-scale conflicts as much as possible; additionally, the underscoring of equality and mutual benefit, as positive objectives underpinning international collaboration, had been translated into members of the NAM's developing economic and trade agreements that exclusively favored one another. This was achievable, in the sense that neither the USSR nor the proverbial West saw it as necessary, or fostered further action to ensure the integration of energy and commodity provision, supply chains, and financial systems.

Today, further integration is clearly no longer feasible. As globalization brought national economies – even those in apparently distinct geopolitical blocs – substantially closer. Furthermore, many small and medium powers have shifted from taciturn, defensively neutral positions towards engaging in all sorts of proactive geopolitical strategies, such as hedging or cultivating utility for multiple larger powers. Consider, for instance, the past decade of diplomacy from ASEAN states, which saw them balance their ongoing military and strategic ties with America, with their rapidly growing economic and financial stake in China – this offers a powerful example of what hedging looks like. Or, indeed, take a look at Kazakhstan and Qatar's emergence as sites for conversations and negotiations over the fate of Afghanistan: both are prime exemplars of how small and medium-sized countries can make themselves useful and relevant in broader international political contexts.<sup>4</sup> Non-alignment is no longer about non-involvement, but about *proactive neutrality*: countries do their very best to remain fundamentally neutral, yet this need not manifest through, and often requires the express abandonment of, inaction and passivity.

More generally, with technological, civil society-based human-to-human, and economic-financial exchanges becoming vastly more ubiquitous and contiguous across countries, the prospects for non-aligned states to sever relations entirely, or to minimize their exposure to exogenous shocks, have decreased markedly. For example, the fates of countries in the Horn of Africa are increasingly intertwined with the future of NATO and [perceived] credibility of its members to honor their words over counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the

4 "Afghanistan Peace Process," United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/programs/afghanistan-peace-process>.

Indian Ocean. Thus, it is high time to reflect, once again, upon what non-alignment has historically both meant and entailed.

## The Case for a New Non-Alignment Manifesto

To design a new manifesto for non-aligned states today, the core set of principles should reflect a set of prerequisite commitments and values that accommodate the diverse range of viewpoints and interests that constitute the NAM. The following recommendations respond to those design requirements.

The first tenet is the decoupling of the interests of non-centered states from the narrowly defined, exclusionary interests of the great powers. By great powers, I refer to powers that possess strategic autonomy and the capacity to exercise such autonomy across a wide range of domains, including the political, economic, and financial; by exclusionary interests, I speak of interests that exclude or stand in stark juxtaposition to the interests of others. As an example of exclusionary interest, consider the United States as a great power, and its interests in staking claims in the South China Sea against the wishes of smaller states in the region and international protocols.<sup>5</sup>

Non-alignment does not imply having a stance, but the stance must be arrived at by appealing to the interests of small and medium independent states, as opposed to great power politics. Non-aligned states can say “No!” when cajoled and pressed by leading parties to take sides in international conflicts. Where they to partially align themselves over specific issues with great powers, the alignment would be innately transient and grounded in the interests of the non-aligned community as a whole. As such, the leaders of small states who opt to act as leaders of vassals for greater powers would be disqualified from any claim to non-alignment.

The second tenet is the renewed involvement of non-aligned states in multilateral institutions. Historically, the NAM had been equated with the pursuit of peace through informal arrangements and dialogue sandwiched between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. In a post-Cold War global order, one in which transnational institutions have come to

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5 Council on Foreign Relations, “Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea,” Global Conflict Tracker, May 4, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>.

increasing prominence, non-aligned states can and should make use of their access to multilateral institutions. They can collectively sway votes in the United Nations General Assembly, hold to account members of the Security Council, and empower and give a platform for voices that may otherwise be excluded from international discourse.

Multilateralism is a necessary ingredient in any cogent vision of pacifism. Historically, the NAM's appeal for South-South cooperation had eschewed the development of substantial entrenched connections and partnerships between non-aligned states in the Global South and North.<sup>6</sup> However, peacekeeping, through both democratic dissemination and peace-oriented discourse, requires countries to do more than acting unilaterally or alignment within regional blocs. The war in Ukraine threatens to once again divide the world into two or more disparate coalitions. The non-aligned states must promote negotiations and transparent communication between adversarial powers to restore the global public's confidence in international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

The most important and final commitment underpinning non-alignment is that no non-aligned state should ever approach international relations and statecraft through the normatively laden and values-centric lenses that major powers cultivate and propagate. Whether it be Russia's revanchist Eurasianism<sup>7</sup> or America's fixation over the ostensible promotion of "democracy,"<sup>8</sup> non-aligned states must do better than to be ensnared and turned into pawns echoing ideologies generated to justify hegemony and dominance.

To paraphrase Karl Marx, non-aligned peoples of the world, unite!

- 6 "What Is 'South-South Cooperation' and Why Does It Matter?," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, March 20, 2019, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/intergovernmental-coordination/south-south-cooperation-2019.html>.
- 7 Sarah Klump, "Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire," Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/russian-eurasianism-ideology-empire>.
- 8 "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Statement on the 'Summit for Democracy' Held by the United States," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, December 11, 2021, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw665399/s2510665401/2535665405/202112/t2021121110466939.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw665399/s2510665401/2535665405/202112/t2021121110466939.html).

# Welcoming Non-Alignment

## Challenges and Prospects



**Gulshan Bibi**

Ph.D. candidate, School of  
International Relations and Public  
Affairs, Fudan University  
TI Youth Observer

Presenting non-alignment as a state policy, Mr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana, once said, “We neither face East nor West, we face forward.” In opposition to external pressure and alignments formed at the end of World War II, the concept of non-alignment surfaced and evolved during the Cold War. By encouraging the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, foreign occupation, and non-interference, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) supported self-determination, national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also propagated restructuring of the international economic system and aimed at international cooperation on an equal footing.

At that time, the Western world viewed the NAM concept with negativity and believed that it was a pro-Soviet strategy. Later, with the end of the Cold War in 1991, the West considered that the concept of non-alignment had lost both relevance and substance. However, reports of the demise of NAM were premature. Many states chose not to join the united fronts that emerged as new power centers attempted to restructure the world into several blocs. Bloc restructuring, led by the U.S., occurred once again both before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While the Russian military action in Ukraine has attracted Western condemnation and sanctions, for a majority of UN members, non-alignment with the U.S.-led bloc has been their stated position. The question arises as to why states are welcoming non-alignment? Such states hold that each country can operate an independent policy based on the coexistence of states and non-alignment. Moreover, an emerging new feature in this landscape is developing states embracing non-alignment status, not just over the Ukraine crisis, but more broadly as a principle of International Relations (IR). For many of

these states, past colonialism was a key unifying factor. The current confrontation between the U.S. and Russia has spillover effects for many of these countries, causing them to believe they are merely buffer zones in the expansion of superpower's spheres of influence. Thus, non-alignment is conceived as an essential element of their national interest, independence and survival.

## Challenges and Prospects

While non-alignment as a strategy has influenced international thinking and approaches to many regional and global issues, it faces multiple challenges. There is a school of thought in the West which believes that non-alignment is an instrument for malign powers to legitimize their actions and should, therefore, be discontinued. In this view, non-alignment could be undermined quickly, because its existence was merely a product of, and justified by, Cold War rivalry; thus, without a cold war, non-alignment was neither justified nor necessary.

However, the existing state of affairs has demonstrated to many observers that the challenges to non-alignment are few, while the prospects are many. These prospects have convinced more states to revitalize non-alignment as a middle path in global competition. The proponents of non-alignment have understood that while the Cold War was not permanent, superpower rivalry will persist. Unlike many Western political leaders, Eastern thinkers believe that non-alignment remains relevant and must be continued. They frame their arguments on the following three bases:

- 1 There are still unresolved and new issues that require collective action. Moreover, many issues have taken new form and shape. Climate change, trade wars, revolution in military affairs, terrorism, ethnic conflicts, and gender-based violence are some of the common issues facing many states today. Furthermore, despite total elimination of colonialism, the essence of colonialism, such as control and hegemony exerted by external forces, continues in different forms. Neo-colonialism has evolved into a major concern of weak societies in the Global South. Foreign actors and their interventions do not and cannot resolve the aforementioned issues for developing and under-developed states. These issues are more adroitly handled and resolved through internal mechanisms and both bilateral and multilateral collaboration amongst states. Thus, non-alignment will and must continue to focus on these issues.

- 2 Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) - Brexit - is a pertinent example of how the current international system and institutions favor strong and resourceful independent states. Many other European states, however, have been unwilling to reduce their overrepresentation in international multilateral institutions. Since a number of states in the Eastern region are either small or weak, they find it difficult to compete with powerful states in the North. In order to safeguard their independence and protect national interest, they require support of either powerful states or a regional organization. Many of these states are a part of regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and so on and so forth. For these states, which prefer partnership over aid, non-alignment could provide a strong base to advance their national and common interests.
  
- 3 Both national interest and priorities-based assessments underpin a state's active engagement in international politics. Since the international system is dynamic and constantly changing, non-alignment helps states operate with more confidence and independence within the international arena. In the conduct of its IR, each state is committed to gaining support for its domestic priorities, seeking the peaceful resolution of conflicts and promoting economic development through regional and international cooperation. For many states, cooperation and multilateralism are seen as fundamental pillars in the realization of foreign policy priorities and advancement of development agendas. These states believe that the West has little to offer, or that offers of assistance are tainted with the legacy of colonialism. As a matter of principle, free nations oppose territorial expansion by force. They believe the world to be far more dangerous if big countries can invade peaceful neighboring countries with impunity. For the big powers, the Non-Aligned Movement remains unjustified today for the same reasons it was seen as unjustified during the Cold War. Yet, the proven path toward wealth creation and freedom is undercut by the developed world's progressive development assistance paradigm, which rewards poor economic policies with more aid. In this view, aid is often laden with social agendas incompatible with the recipients' cultural norms and directs investments toward politically favored industries, such as renewables, that reward elites and leave the poor poorer.

The concept of non-alignment is not only beneficial for small or weak states, but also assists more powerful states to promote their national interests. The unipolar system that emerged at the end of the Cold War was believed by many observers to underpin the international structure for the long run.

However, the “end of history” proved vulnerable as two major trends emerged: (a) a significant decline in US influence, and; (b) the emergence of new states with the power and capacity to influence the system. While there is still potential for global bloc politics to re-emerge, due to the expansion of the U.S.-led NATO military alliance system, the Eastern states are striving to build new economic coalitions. These Eastern states still require institutional support to effectively operate within an international order that is dominated by powerful Western interests. On that account, one cannot simply rule out the possibility of another round of major power rivalry in future.

Such a future scenario could force the majority of the states into yet another security dilemma similar to that of the Cold War era. The repeat of such a dilemma would force many states into decisions of whether to align, or not, with one or other of the extant power centers. Rather than attempting to reinvent the wheel, these states would prefer a role in global affairs independent of the strategic competition between the West and the East. However, the notion of non-alignment risks being narrowly defined as non-cooperation with the West or other present and future power centers, thus positioning non-aligned states as merely protesters. As such, NAM members must be willing to work with the West and other centers of power on the basis of constructive engagement. While cooperation-based development for nations that are free, secure and prosperous is crucial, achieving the objective of constructive engagement requires a focus on selective collaboration. From the perspective of non-alignment, a selective collaboration approach has the potential to facilitate better foreign policy and developmental outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Non-alignment represents both the desire and the means by which states may avoid emerging conflicts and reject participation in the creation of alliances that attempt to formalize the post-crisis division of the world. Adherence to non-alignment is prompted not only by the lack of affinity for the causes of post-crisis division, but also by the determination to maximize freedom of behavior in IR. Since the dynamics of the new world order are constantly changing, the

international system may evolve into several rival blocs or power centers. In the face of the challenges posed by superpower rivalry and the new Cold War, non-alignment continues to offer an alternate policy response. Accordingly, non-alignment is not only a guiding principle, but also a strategy to ensure independence from both the present Western alliance system and power-centers that may arise in the future. The culture, values, concerns, and operational approaches of many states differ substantially from those practiced in the West. For the majority of countries that believe “freedom is the absence of external interference,” the current state of global affairs only strengthens the logic of non-alignment.

## About this volume

TI Observer would like to thank the following individuals for their time and insights.

### Commentators



#### Jorge Heine

Research Professor,  
Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University  
Non-Resident Global Fellow, The Woodrow Wilson International  
Center for Scholars  
Former Ambassador of Chile to China (2014-2017)



#### Varun Sahni

Professor of International Politics, Jawaharlal Nehru University,  
New Delhi  
Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Goa



#### Elizabeth Sidiropoulos

National Director, South African Institute of International  
Affairs (SAIIA), Johannesburg



#### Steven Gruz

Head of the African Governance and Diplomacy Program  
Head of the Russia-Africa Project at SAIIA



#### Esteban Actis

Lecturer, Universidad Nacional del Rosario, Rosario, Argentina  
Co-Author,  
*La disputa por el poder global: China contra Estados Unidos en la  
crisis de la pandemia*



#### Cheng-Chwee Kuik

Professor, Universiti Kebangsaan (National University of)  
Malaysia (UKM)  
Non-Resident Fellow, The Foreign Policy Institute,  
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies,  
Johns Hopkins University



#### Paul Evans

HSBC Chair in Asian Research, University of British Columbia  
Pok Rafeah Chair, Institute of Malaysian and International  
Studies (IKMAS), UKM



#### Hari Seshasayee

Global Fellow, The Woodrow Wilson International Center  
for Scholars  
Trade Advisor to the Colombian Government



#### Huang Yunsong

Deputy Dean, School of International Studies,  
Sichuan University  
Coordinator, China Center for South Asian Studies

### TI Youth Observers



#### Brian Wong Yueshun

Ph.D. candidate, Oxford University  
TI Youth Observer



#### Gulshan Bibi

Ph.D. candidate, School of International Relations and Public  
Affairs, Fudan University  
TI Youth Observer

## TIO Executive Committee



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TIO Editor-in-Chief  
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Taihe International Communications Center (TICC)

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## Taihe Institute

[www.taiheinstitute.org/en](http://www.taiheinstitute.org/en)



太和智库  
Taihe Institute



Taihe Institute

## Address

23/F, ShunMaijinZuan Plaza,  
A-52 Southern East Third Ring Road,  
Chaoyang District, Beijing

## Telephone

+86-10-84351977

## Postcode

100022

## Fax

+86-10-84351957