

THE MOVEMENT OF NONALIGNMENT

An Obituary with Reservations

Nonalignment stands for various things in international politics. Some of its aspects are relevant to international law, others must be analysed in terms of foreign policy strategies. For a particular nonaligned country, nonalignment may, primarily, be a question of safeguarding national independence and security; for another, influence on world politics is at stake; for a third, it is effects on internal policies which are decisive; while for a fourth, all these dimensions must be taken into account. Nonalignment might also connote a movement of, above all, newly independent states, which appeared in international politics after the Second World War.

The many possibilities of analysing nonalignment, as well as the difficulties in agreeing about a generally acceptable connotation, were amply illustrated at an international symposium which the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade arranged in January 1969. The scholars, assembled to discuss nonalignment in the contemporary world, held dissimilar opinions about such matters as the general features of nonalignment, its genetic roots, its objectives, its place within the international system, and so on.¹ The international nomenclature is, accordingly, very blurred — synonyms of nonalignment are legion: »active independence«, »non-identification«, »discretionary alignment and neutralism«, and »active formal neutralism« are some of the many alternatives occurring. Scholars sometimes prefer »neutralism« as a common denominator, sometimes »nonalignment«; sometimes they use these terms interchangeably or try to make a distinction between them. To maintain that the implications of nonalignment today have become more clear is, certainly, to go to extremes. On this occasion I shall refrain from any general assessment and restrict myself to discussing nonalignment as it evolved as a new factor in international politics after the Second World War, trying to evaluate the Movement of Nonalignment's position and role.

¹ Papers and proceedings from the symposium are published in Lj. Aćimović, ed., *Nonalignment in the World of Today, International Symposium, Petrovaradin, 16—18 January, 1969* (Beograd: Institute of International Politics and Economics, 1969).

Nonalignment as a Movement

The Movement of Nonalignment is related to the anti-colonial revolution, which swept over Asia and Africa in the aftermath of the war. Being former colonies, suffering from economic and social underdevelopment, sharing a certain geographic location, and in need of national identity as independent members of the family of nations, the new states refused to align themselves with any of the Great Power blocs. By supplementing this almost general tendency to remain nonaligned with mutual political cooperation, they have formed what is known as the Movement of Nonalignment. The collaboration undertaken within this framework should be distinguished — though this is not always done — from that which bears the signature of Afro-Asianism. Their common ground with respect to membership must not hide the different basis of principle. For Afro-Asianism, the formal criterion for inclusion is geographical, making a state's physical location the *differentiae specifica* and the attitude towards the Cold War a secondary factor; for the Movement of Nonalignment, on the other hand, the approach to the East-West conflict is pre-eminent and makes geographic position irrelevant. In this way it has, for instance, been possible for a European country like Yugoslavia to become a distinguished member of the Movement. Even countries like France and Sweden have been contemplated as potential members.

The Movement of Nonalignment's reputation as a specific grouping of states in international politics has been furthered by its organizational arrangements — the spectacular conferences which have been held at irregular intervals since the early 1960s and the occasional meetings of leaders from nonaligned countries in between have helped to promote the impression of a distinct assembly of acountries.

International Political Role

How, then, should this political cooperation on the basis of non-alignment be evaluated? As I said, this will be considered here from an international perspective, starting with its influence on world affairs.

It is easy to find statements and assessments which bear witness to a very high appreciation of the Movement's position in the world. Besides politicians personally engaged in the Movement's activities, there are scholars who have been keen to pay homage to its achievements, though it must be admitted that the latter usually work in nonaligned countries. But it is equally easy, among politicians and scholars outside the nonaligned countries, to find opinions to the contrary, reducing the Movement to an insignificant international force. In arriving at a verdict, it is indeed difficult to deny that the

unending rhetoric about the immediate and direct influence of the Movement upon mutual relations between the Great Powers, particularly the Soviet Union and the United States, is not well founded in hard facts. At all events, during a crisis or other circumstances when vital national interests are at stake, Great Powers are in a position to — and do usually, if not always — ignore actions and opinions which are not backed by physical power. And despite their other capabilities, the nonaligned countries do not have power in this sense. The Soviet-American Cuba crisis, the Middle East conflict, the interventions of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, the US war in Vietnam — these are all events in which the role of the nonaligned countries could be dismissed as rather insignificant. But even in less dramatic situations it is doubtful whether the Movement of Nonalignment has made a significant contribution in bringing the Great Powers together or influencing their policies. The China policy of the United States is a case in point, another is the Moscow test ban treaty in 1963.

In connection with the latter, the first Conference of Nonalignment, held in Belgrade in September 1961, admittedly took an initiative in sending identically worded letters to President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev, requesting them to resume negotiations with each other so as to improve the international outlook, which had not lightened after their first meeting in Vienna in June 1961.² And it so happened that the international atmosphere did become brighter, as illustrated by the agreement on nuclear tests. To many of the nonaligned countries, this was a testimony of their influence on the crucial questions in the world. However, a chronological connection is no proof of a causal relationship. The belief that the Movement of Nonalignment exerted a major influence on Great Power agreement over a military-strategic treaty of this magnitude belittles, among other things, the following factors: that the military-strategic balance in general favoured such an agreement within the nuclear field, that the over-increasing cost of producing nuclear weapons motivated a halt, that a détente was welcome since the Soviet Union was, and still is, in need of Western technology and the Western powers in need of new commercial markets.

Advocates of nonaligned cooperation, while admitting that the aim of affecting immediate East-West relations is doomed to disappointments, often cite activities to do with colonial and economic issues as examples of successful work. However, this, too, can be questioned.

In the case of colonial issues, it is clear that in practice the Movement of Nonalignment has followed in the footsteps of work

² The letter is reproduced in *The Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, Belgrade, September 1—6, 1961* (Beograd: Jugoslavija, 1961), p. 264.

undertaken within an Afro-Asian or African framework. Its efforts have never gone beyond what exclusive Afro-Asian cooperation has accomplished by itself. This was especially clear at the Conference in Lusaka in September 1970, when the declarations on colonial issues mainly reflected standpoints taken earlier by the Organization of African Unity.

On economic issues the situation is more problematic, being complicated by the fact that one of the most ardent champions of closer economic cooperation between nonaligned countries has been Yugoslavia, which in a way should be considered the nonaligned country *par préférence*. Proposals within the economic field were put forward by President Tito as early as during the General Debate at the Belgrade Conference in 1961.³ At that time, the Movement turned an almost deaf ear to his suggestions. Then, on Yugoslavia's initiative, an economic conference of nonaligned countries was convened in Cairo in July 1962, attended by thirtyone countries, Yugoslavia being the only one from Europe. The ensuing discussions might be seen as a prelude to the cooperation between countries from the Third World, impressively manifested in 1964 during the first session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva. But herein lies the complication — cooperation among nonaligned countries within the economic sphere becomes a part of economic cooperation, which includes all countries in the Third World. The *raison d'être* of nonalignment is replaced by the criterion of being a developing country, whose alignment or not with a Great Power bloc is of secondary importance.

Function in the System of States

Thus, the evidence hardly supports the factual importance of the Movement of Nonalignment in the handling of essential international issues. But when one considers the functioning of the international system of states, a different picture emerges. The Movement then assumes a function, which should be considered from two inter-related aspects.

First, by constituting a loose but nevertheless distinct international gathering of countries, the Movement has been and still is a source of identity for any states which might otherwise lack the power or courage to resist pressures from one of the Cold War blocs. In this case the Movement, just by existing and irrespective of its accomplishments, offers a country the opportunity to mark by membership its position of nonalignment in relation to the Great Powers. For certain interests and conceptions, it is precisely this unwillingness to adhere to a united front against the enemy which

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 162 f.

is the deplorable thing about nonalignment. But this does not apply from other viewpoints. It has, for instance, been maintained that the attitude of non-involvement in the East-West conflict implies a change in the whole international structure by offering an alternative model to the orthodox power image of international relations, without the nonaligned countries themselves deliberately pursuing such a policy.⁴ To me, this is perhaps too easy a way of dismissing the conception of power in international politics. It seems rather that the nonaligned countries have adopted the kind of traditional policy from the history of the nation-state, whereby international power constellations permitted small countries to assume an independent attitude towards Great Powers. What is new in the phenomenon of nonalignment in the international system after World War II is that the growing number of independent states has swollen the ranks of the nonaligned. Owing to circumstances relating to the specific character of Great Power rivalry as expressed in the Cold War, and to the more complicated power structure nowadays, the nonaligned countries have been able to fend off the Great Powers. Of course, it is not self-evident that the existence of many nonaligned units in the international system contributes by itself to peace. As territories where the Great Power contest is unresolved, the nonaligned states might very well have a destabilizing function. But it is equally, if not more reasonable to maintain that this is too mechanical a view of inter-state relations. To prevent peoples and nations, aspiring to self-government, from establishing independent states, besides being deplorable from a human point of view, also generates instability in the international system. At the same time, once independence has been acquired, political and social stability must be maintained lest Great Powers or neighbours find pretext for intervening. Yet most nonaligned countries do not fulfill the criterion of being well-established, stable states. On this point, I think the Movement of Nonalignment has an additional task, the second aspect of its function, to which I now will turn.

The nonaligned countries are, in general, characterized by great social, cultural, and ethnic differences, besides having a subsistence economy. In many cases, their boundaries are the artificial product of colonial powers. In attempting to industrialize and develop, their political leaders are faced with what has been termed a crisis of modernization, a period in the forming of a nation-state which countries in Europe underwent more than a century ago, transforming their traditional, agrarian communities into modern, industrialized societies. That such a process raises complex problems, threatening to split up and communalize the countries concerned, is all too clear from European history. Unifying factors are badly needed —

⁴ J. W. Burton, *International Relations. A General Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 231 f.

a sense of loyalty to the national entity, transcending traditional cultural and social allegiances. It is this psychological function which the Movement of Nonalignment might contribute. By providing its members with the forum of a chosen community of states, it helps to shape their international identity as active subjects and units on the international scene. In a way, this is done by the United Nations, but the exclusive character of the Movement puts it in a different category from the world organization with its universal membership.

It is admittedly difficult to assess the importance of foreign policy activities for opinions and feelings within a country. One comes up against the old problem of the relationship between a country's internal and external policies. The mechanisms involved presumably function most directly and efficiently when a country is engaged in a serious conflict with some other country or group of countries. There are many instances in history of an alleged or real threat from outside having strengthened internal support for a shaky régime. With respect to the Movement of Nonalignment, provided a country is not actually engaged in an acute conflict, the references to enemy conspiracies take the form of general condemnations of imperialism, neocolonialism and Great Power policy as permanent threats to the independence of the nonaligned countries, thus assembled for a Conference. However, our particular interest concerns the effect on public opinions at home of participation as such in this kind of international gathering. The influence is then likely to be more subtle and intricate than in situations of crisis.

The most direct expression of the latter kind of connection is, of course, when political leaders from other nonaligned countries are invited as guests in order to lend international support to a régime with internal troubles. This kind of help from outside no doubt plays a part within the Movement of Nonalignment. To mention a striking example, it seems that the much-heralded meeting in New Delhi in October 1966 between Presidents Tito and Nasser and Premier Indira Gandhi was convened as much or more to emphasize the latter's international prestige and reputation in the face of internal political difficulties as it was to provide a political exchange in the interests of the Movement of Nonalignment. Another example might be the Conference in Lusaka in 1970, which assembled very conveniently for President Kaunda's internal political problems.

There are also more indirect ways of influencing public opinion. A general pattern in connection with the Conferences of Nonalignment, as in all such contexts, is to give extreme publicity to speeches and activities undertaken by one own's country and to exaggerate their importance and effect on nonaligned fellow-countries and the world at large. Another tactic is to do the same with respect to the Conference as a whole. Its work and declarations are said to have left a massive imprint on world opinion, making a considerable con-

tribution to peace in the world in general and to peaceful relations between the Great Powers in particular.

It will suffice to recall the example of the Moscow test ban treaty, allegedly concluded in response to pressure from the nonaligned countries. A third variant consists of statements which stress the outstanding quality of the Movement itself in respect of virtues like good morality and political wisdom. In all these cases, the Movement of Nonalignment serves a psychological function as a convenient forum for foreign policy activities with the purpose of manifesting a state's international identity, a unit in the international system of states, worthy of loyalty and national pride. Again, this feeling of loyalty is no doubt generated independently of the extent to which the Movement as a whole or an individual member is successful in promoting its goals. The important thing is not what is accomplished but what people in a certain country *believe* has been done and in this respect the modern media of communication, combined with repressive political and social systems, offer unusual possibilities of manipulating public opinion. The most insignificant action or appearance can, accordingly, be presented as an event with wide international repercussions.

Power and Identity

It remains to ponder why the Movement of Nonalignment has failed to become a significant force in international politics, at the same time as its existence can be justified in terms which its advocates may find too modest. Several factors may be relevant here. The most immediate has, of course, to do with a lack of power. The Movement of Nonalignment has always, primarily, made an impression by virtue of the great number of countries involved and not on account of its material strength. To some extent, however, one can compensate for such a disadvantage. Employing a power concept which stresses organization as a traditional attribute of power, we note that the Movement complies with a basic characteristic of an organization: a common identity. A number of states share the view that nonalignment in relation to the Cold War and Great Powers is the only decent attitude in international politics. On the other hand, they have not managed to take the next step and turn their common viewpoint into effective political action. They have not established channels of communication through which perceptions, values, goals and strategies can flow continuously and regularly.⁵ Within the Movement, Yugoslavia has displayed an awareness of the importance of this point: at the time of the first Conference of Nonalignment

⁵ M. R. Singer, *Weak States in a World of Powers* (New York: The Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan Ltd, 1972), pp. 70 f.

in Belgrade she already appreciated the need for permanent institutional links between the nonaligned countries.⁶ However, owing to political considerations, she did not propose this formally either then or at the next Conference in Cairo, and it was not until the gathering in Lusaka in 1970 that a first embryonic move was made towards some kind of permanent machinery. But it was the increasing understanding of the importance of economic cooperation, rather than political considerations, which decided the matter.

The main reason why a common identity has not found expression in a strong organizational construction is to be sought in the fact that the existing basis for identity is rather weak. The nonaligned countries are united against the Great Power blocs in a common negative front, not in a positive goal. It might be objected that another source of identity exists in the strong moral convictions mentioned above concerning the Movement's mission to bring peace, justice and humanity to a world in trouble. The problem here is that such an objective, although positive, is so generally worded and devoid of concrete content that it is worthless as a goal for united political action. Taken seriously, it embodies the illusion that newly independent states in general and nonaligned countries in particular are better equipped than Great Powers and imperialist and former colonialist countries to form a »co-ordinated accumulated moral force«, as President Soekarno put it at the Belgrade Conference.⁷ In their mutual relations and contacts with their aligned neighbours, the nonaligned countries have shown that their behaviour and attitudes in no way differ from those of other countries, whether big or small, when fundamental national interests are thought to be threatened. And how could it be otherwise? The nonaligned countries, any more than other states, cannot ignore, circumvent or evade the political, social, and economic forces which determine and are reflected in the policies of governments. This is not to say that morality plays no part in world affairs. It definitely does. Moral incitements are impelling forces for individuals in their private as well as their public life. But a huge gathering of states like the Movement of Nonalignment can never base concerted political action mainly on moral values. They must be reinforced by other incentives.

In this context, too, Yugoslavia warrants attention. More than then any other nonaligned country she has tried to anchor the policy of nonalignment to a more substantial foundation than a moral credo. Being communists, with a thorough theoretical training in the Marxist-Leninist tradition, the Yugoslavs have elaborated a political and ideological framework of nonalignment which surpasses all others. The concept which serves as a general formula for

⁶ J. Đerđa, »Before the Cairo Meeting«, *Review of International Affairs*, vol. XV, no. 346, 1965, p. 3.

⁷ *The Belgrade Conference*, op. cit., p. 27.

the various components, is active, peaceful coexistence. The ultimate theoretical prerequisite for this tenet is the doctrine of socialism in one country. Accordingly, it implies a break with *Lenin's* deterministic conception of the world socialist revolution as a violent contest between capitalism / imperialism and socialism. But this leaves the field open for subjective elements to determine policies. Therefore, like all other leaders of governments and states, the Yugoslavs see a country's foreign policy as a question of deliberate choices between alternative strategies. Their tenets of coexistence are, thus, of an exclusive, normative character, their acceptance by other countries within the Movement being a problem of will and persuasion. And the other nonaligned countries have been reluctant to adhere to Yugoslav conceptions of the world. They have not been prepared to invest the Movement of Nonalignment with a positive content by subscribing to foreign policy tenets, which in reality are incompatible with their interests, reflecting in the main feudal and bourgeois-nationalist societies.⁸ The many divergencies as to political and social systems, religions, cultures and material and human resources, which characterize the nonaligned countries in spite of their common attitude towards the Cold War, have appeared more decisive than their adherence to nonalignment. On the whole, we might conclude that the example of the Movement of Nonalignment confirms the thesis that it is objective political, economic and social forces, not merely good will and high principles, which govern politics.

The economic cooperation which, not least because of Yugoslavia's work, has begun to play an increasing role among nonaligned countries, might bring an element of identity to the Movement of Nonalignment. And if, as seems to be happening, the attitude of non-involvement in the Cold War conflict were to be adopted by more and more Third World countries which are aligned at present, the distinction between alignment and nonalignment would lose importance with respect to this area of the world. Their common economic problems will then be the first and main item on the agenda. However, there is still an obstacle to overcome: industrialized nonaligned countries will be excluded from such a gathering almost by definition. There is no reason to believe that, for example, Sweden's economic interests will ever coincide with those of the Third World, or that they will be set aside for the benefit of political cooperation on a nonaligned basis. It seems to me, therefore, that the Movement of Nonalignment might survive either as a purely formal and politically harmless institution, or as an organization for economic cooperation, comprising poor and developing countries

⁸ L. Nord, *Nonalignment and Socialism, Yugoslav Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice*; Publications of the Political Science Association in Uppsala, 69 (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren in distribution, 1974), pp. 13—165, *passim*.

from the Third World, for whom the political criterion of nonalignment is retained for ceremonial reasons but in reality stands for common economic interests. In the latter situation, nonaligned countries on the way to becoming highly industrialized might have to choose between taking the lead in imparting some kind of strong political identity to the Movement, leaving it, or remaining detached honorary members for historic and nostalgic reasons.