

Tehran hosts 16th Summit of Non-aligned Movement of Independent Nations

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The non-aligned movement of nations (NAM) was founded in Belgrade in 1961 by Josip Broz Tito, Jawaharlal Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah and president Sukarno of Indonesia, all legends of national liberation and independence. Founding members fiercely opposed colonialism and imperialism, advocating instead an independent course running between the two opposing Eastern and Western ideological extremes.



Today NAM has come of age, with 118 of the world's 192 states attending the summit - a sweet irony for the inaugural host nation (former) Yugoslavia, which was invaded and broken up by non-member states America, UK and former European fascist nations.

NAM has today become the REAL WORLD POWER summit with the largest bloc of nations attending. Notably absent are the USA, Israel, Australia, UK and West European powers. It is clear that any bloc that boasts over half the world's nations, including BRIC, as members is the REAL decisive power in today's world.

The push and shove violent tactics of Israel and America/NATO may soon be a thing of the past as no minority group could viably prevail against so many nations regardless of military strength.

The summit has received scant coverage in the West and those outlets that have covered it did so in biased and negative terms. Nevertheless, NAM has never sought fanfare or publicity preferring instead to get down to the BUSINESS of solving the many problems inflicted on the WORLD by rogue States USA, Israel and NATO.

The first and last mistake the US/NATO and its short-sighted allies made was to bomb traditional ally Yugoslavia and to oversee its dismemberment into powerless client states. I still possess formal invitations from Neru and other founding NAM State leaders inviting immediate family to attend functions in their Embassies; the invitations were for the person behind the 'golden voice' of post war radio Belgrade, which broadcast, in perfect (Australian) English, a now realised ideal to the WORLD.

Indeed, Australian English is the first language of my family which arrived in Western Australia from

the Balkan States in the late 19th century -- yet our family continues to suffer the outrageous racism of Anglo-Australians courtesy of racist-in-chief and war criminal, John 'aluminium tubing' Howard and his band of insular conservative sycophants. Well, I have news ... courtesy of Marshall Tito!

NAM -- The South gathers in Tehran

by Vijay Prashad

Next week, representatives from 118 of the world's 192 states will gather in Tehran for the 16th Non-Aligned Movement summit.

Created in 1961, the NAM was a crucial platform for the Third World Project (whose history I detail in *The Darker Nations*). It was formed to purge the majority of the world from the toxic Cold War and from the maldevelopment pushed by the World Bank. After two decades of useful institution-building, the NAM was suffocated by the enforced debt crisis of the 1980s. It has since gasped along.

In the corners of the NAM meetings, delegates mutter about the arrogance of the North, particularly the US, whose track record over the past few decades has been pretty abysmal. Ronald Reagan's dismissal of the problems of the South at the 1981 Cancun Summit on the North-South Dialogue still raises eyebrows, and George W Bush's cowboy sensibility still earns a few chuckles. But apart from these cheap thrills, little of value comes out of the NAM. Until the last decade there have been few attempts to create an ideological and institutional alternative to neoliberalism or to unipolar imperialism.

With the arrival of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in the past few years, the mood has lifted. The much more assertive presence of the BRICS inside the NAM and in the United Nations has raised hopes that US and European intransigence will no longer determine the destiny of the world. At the 14th NAM summit in Cuba (2006), the world seemed lighter. Hugo Chavez' jokes went down well; Fidel Castro was greeted as a titan. This seemed like the old days, or at least Delhi in 1983.

NAM summits typically go by without fanfare. The Atlantic media rarely notice the movement's presence. But this year, because the summit is to be held in Tehran, eyebrows have been raised.

The US State Department's Victoria Nuland hastened to condemn the location as "a strange place and an inappropriate place for this meeting ... Our point is simply that Tehran, given its number of grave violations of international law and UN obligations, does not seem to be the appropriate place" for the NAM summit.

The US government is particularly chafed that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is making his pilgrimage to the NAM (he has attended every NAM summit since 1961, when Dag Hammarskjöld left Belgrade to his death over African skies). Nuland notes that the US has expressed its "concern" to Ban. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was plainer: "Mr Secretary General, your place is not in Tehran."

Bombs over Tehran

Israel has been playing a peculiar game these past few months. Netanyahu and his coterie are the mirror image of the clownish behavior of Iranian President Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad: Both have a fulsome sense of themselves, preening before cameras with bluster. Sensational bulletins come from their mouths.

The fear is that Netanyahu is playing chicken with the US. He wants either to bait President Barack Obama to ratchet up the sanctions and fire off one or two missiles, or else to let loose his own hawks, flying twice the distance that they flew to Osirak in 1982 to bomb Bushehr now. Netanyahu's pressure startled his own president, Shimon Peres, who hastened to note, "It is clear that we cannot do this single-handedly and that we must coordinate with America." All this is a game of Chinese whispers, with so little clarity about what anyone is actually saying, and a great deal of anxiety about the exaggerations that have overwhelmed any capacity for mature discussion.

The US seems to want time for the new sanctions regime to take effect. In March, Iranian banks were disconnected from the SWIFT network that enables electronic financial transactions. Pressure on countries that import Iranian oil were stepped up, as the US and the Europeans threatened to take action against those who did not follow their own sanctions regime (which are much harsher than the various UN resolutions that run from 1696, from 2006, to 1929, from 2010).

Iran's central bank has pointed to a deep decline in the share of Iranian exports - and concomitantly, a perilous position for its population. What seems not to be on the radar of those who create these sanctions regimes is that they rarely turn the population against its government. In Iran, it might actually be detrimental to the reform movement. Washington fulminates about autocracy in Iran and the bomb, but it does not realize that for most Iranians (44% of whom live in slums), the core problem is of livelihood and well-being.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will be in Tehran. He will meet with Ahmadinejad, and talk to him about India's attempt to circumvent the sanctions regime. Between 10% and 12% of India's oil needs are furnished by Iran. There has been an attempt to switch to the Saudi supply, but this is much easier to talk about than to do. The problem for India and Iran has been over payments, since India cannot pay Iran for the oil. Iran has therefore agreed to accept 45% of its oil receipts in rupees, within India, and to use this money to buy Indian goods to import into Iran. Delegations from the business sector have gone back and forth to find things to sell the Iranians. But problems persist: The sanctions regime has made it nearly impossible for Indian tankers to get insurance for their journey to Iran. Nonetheless, the Indian business lobby estimates that bilateral trade between the two countries will rise from US\$13.5 billion to \$30 billion by 2015.

The tete-a-tete between Manmohan Singh and Ahmadinejad will also touch on the Indian investments at the Chabahar port in southeastern Iran, which has been used to bring Indian goods into Iran and to bring 100,000 tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan. India and Iran have invested heavily in Afghanistan, and both have a common interest in making sure that the Taliban do not return to power in Kabul.

Here one would imagine that the US might see eye-to-eye with these old allies, but Washington's obsessive blinkers make it impossible for its officials to be proper diplomats. It has been a long-standing US aim to break the link between India and Iran, two stalwarts in the NAM.

Next week, New Delhi and Tehran will reinforce their fragile ties. Manmohan Singh will not make any grand gesture. This is not his temperament. Nonetheless, economic realities and the accidents of geography make the relationship necessary. This is unfathomable to Washington.

Blood of Syria

The last time the NAM suffered a major political split was when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The bulk of the members wanted to condemn the invasion, while a few of the more influential (Algeria, India, Iraq) refused to go along. It damaged the NAM's credibility. This year, it is Syria that poses the dilemma.

In May, at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, within sight of Hosni Mubarak's hospital incarceration, the NAM coordinating bureau's ministerial meeting tried to put together a resolution on Syria. The Saudis and Qataris wanted a strong condemnation of the regime, but the Syrians, who remain NAM members, took exception to the draft. The final document was anodyne, calling for the success of former UN secretary general Kofi Annan's Six Point Plan.

Annan has quit. In his place has come the seasoned Algerian diplomat and UN bureaucrat Lakhdar Brahimi, who is no stranger to the NAM circuit. Brahimi knows a lot about conflict, having recently been the UN's man in Afghanistan and Iraq, and having been the broker to the Taif Agreement (1989) that suspended the Lebanese Civil War.

Brahimi's role will be difficult. Cynicism tears at Syria's future. Most discussion on Syria comes at it from its geopolitics: What will be the impact of the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime for US power or Gulf Arab power in the region? Will this have a detrimental impact on Hezbollah, on the Palestinians, on the Iranians? These are valuable questions, but they obscure the much more basic class question posed by the uprising in Syria: What is best for the Syrian people?

There is little argument that Assad's regime governs with one hand clothed in the military's iron and the other morphed into a credit card for the kleptocratic neoliberal elite. There is also little argument that the Assad regime's brutality toward its population has a long history, most notably during the first 11 months of the 2011 uprising when the people in their coordination committees chanted *silmiyyeh*, *silmiyyeh* (peaceful, peaceful) as Assad's tanks roared into their midst.

The correct handling of the contradictions should lead one to full support for the freedom of the Syrian people, which has come to mean two things: the end of the Assad regime and the retraction of the hand of the US, the Gulf Arabs and the Russians. But Brahimi will not be able to move an agenda as long as the Syrian people's needs are not at the center of things.

It is also why the NAM will not be able to act effectively vis-a-vis Syria. One NAM delegation to Moscow and another to Riyadh-Doha asking for a suspension of weaponry and a cooling down of the rhetoric would have a marked impact on Assad and his beleaguered circle. This is not in the cards.

Leadership has now fallen on Egypt's new president, Mohamed Morsi. At the Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting in Mecca this month, its 57 states expelled Syria. This followed a resolution put forward by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Only Iranian

Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi cautioned the group not to act in haste. He tried to take shelter in Assad's pronouncements about elections and reforms, none of this meaningful any longer. Salehi and the Iranians are plainly worried about the dynamic of history shifting to the advantage of the Gulf Arabs. This has colored their view of the Syrian conflict.

Egypt built a small bridge to Tehran at the OIC meeting. Morsi proposed the creation of a Contact Group, which would include Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. This was welcomed by all sides. A few days later at a ministerial meeting in Jeddah, Salehi met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohammed Amr to draw out the implications of this Contact Group. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Rahim Mehmanparast said the Contact Group would be a mechanism to "review and follow up on [regional] issues so that peace would be established in the region". Nothing concrete has been achieved so far, but all indications are that Egypt will use the NAM process to find a way between the hard lines on both sides.

Egypt and Iran broke their ties after the 1979 Islamic Republic was formed. But after the ouster of Mubarak, small gestures brought the countries into communication. The Egyptians allowed an Iranian frigate to go through the Suez Canal (the first since 1978). Iran welcomed the Arab Spring in North Africa as an "Islamic Awakening", and hoped for a rapprochement with the new Muslim Brotherhood politicians of the region.

The Qataris and Saudis also had such hopes, and these are antagonistic to Iran. Emir Hamad bin Khalifa of Qatar met with Morsi for dinner last week, where the Qataris pledged \$2 billion in assistance to Egypt (a rumor floated around that the Qataris wanted to lease the Suez Canal, perhaps to prevent passage to those Iranian frigates).

Morsi had welcomed Iranian Vice-President Hamed Baqai a few weeks before the Qatari visit, accepting the invitation to come to Tehran for the NAM meeting and hand over the chair from Egypt to Iran in person. At the OIC meeting, Morsi and Ahmadinejad were seen to speak for a considerable period. It is likely that Morsi would like to fashion himself as the non-aligned voice between Iran and the Gulf Arabs, and to provide Brahimi with the kind of policy space he will require.

Morsi has a complex itinerary. He will go to Tehran via Beijing. Between a conclave with Hu Jintao and then later with Manmohan Singh, between discussions with the Gulf Arabs and the Iranians, Morsi's gestures suggest an affinity with the kind of multipolar foreign policy developed by the BRICS countries.

The tea leaves are hard to read. The top issues on the NAM agenda are Iran and Syria. One is about a war that Israel itches to start, and the other is about a war that the Assad regime is conducting against the Syrian people. The very fact that the NAM summit is taking place in Tehran shows that there remains support for Iran against any precipitous action. If Morsi's Contact Group can be pressured within the NAM to take a strong class position on Syria and not hide behind the cynicism of geopolitics, then this will be seen as a historic summit.

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I salute you comrade Tito, a man of vision, deft political/tactical skill and uncanny political foresight.



Founding members

http://atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/NH23Ak02.html

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-68.html>