For any nation there are certain determinants for the shaping of its foreign policy. National interests, political tradition, geopolitical compulsions, security, economic constraints, international environment and persona of intellectuals and individuals are some important determinants.

Foreign policy is made not by the nation as a whole but by its government. But, the foreign policy of India since the first day of her independence has been the creation of one man, the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Permitted by Congress leaders to specialize in foreign affairs, he prepared for policy-making two decades before freedom. Since independence Nehru has created much of free India's foreign policy and has not simply restated or managed it. Five main factors produced this result: his pre-eminent leadership in domestic politics; his full use of formal and informal authority; his dual role as prime minister and foreign minister; his function as a bridge from the past; and his skill in discussing international relations in terms of widely valued notions, for example, nonviolence.

The foreign policy of the - ancient civilization as well as a young republic – India - reflects deep-rooted historical traditions. India admires her heritages of nonviolence from Guatama Buddha, Emperor Asoka, and Mahatma Gandhi. Panchsheel was a response to a world asking for a new set of principles for the conduct of international relations that would reflect the aspirations of all nations to co-exist and prosper together in peace and harmony. In a speech at Colombo on 28 April 1954, Jawaharlal Nehru coined the phrase “non-alignment” to describe India’s foreign policy.

Panchsheel, or the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, come from the five ancient precepts of Buddhism relative to personal behavior, were first formally enunciated in the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of
China and India signed on April 29, 1954, which stated, in its preamble, that the two Governments “have resolved to enter into the present Agreement based on the following principles:

i. Mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty,
ii. Mutual non-aggression,
iii. Mutual non-interference,
iv. Equality and mutual benefit, and
v. Peaceful co-existence”.

In Nehru’s view, the concepts of Panchsheel constitute the ethical alternative to war: the choice is between Panchsheel and the hydrogen bomb.

Panchsheel was incorporated into the Ten Principles of International Peace and Cooperation enunciated in the Declaration issued by the Bandung Conference of 29 Afro-Asian countries held in April 1955. The universal relevance of Panchsheel was emphasised when its tenets were incorporated in a resolution on peaceful co-existence presented by India, Yugoslavia and Sweden, and unanimously adopted on 11 December, 1957, by the United Nations General Assembly.

The Panchsheel, provided the ideological foundation for the establishment of the Non-aligned Movement. The Non-Aligned Movement was founded and held its first conference, the Belgrade Conference in 1961 under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sukarno of Indonesia. That Conference accepted Panchsheel as the principled core of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Unlike the United Nations (UN) or the Organization of American States, the Non-Aligned Movement has no formal constitution or permanent secretariat. All members of the Non-Aligned Movement have equal weight within its organization. The movement’s positions are reached by consensus in the Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government, which, by convention, convenes every three years. The administration of the organization is the responsibility of the country holding the chair, a position that rotates at every summit. At present the non-aligned movement has 120 members and 17 observer countries.

Nehru's non-aligned foreign policy was an attractive model for most developing countries because it was based on the principles of non-involvement in either of the two alliance systems and an active and independent participation in world affairs.

Furthermore, Nehru saw non-alignment between the superpowers at the time of the Cold War as a vital precondition to protecting national interest.
Thus, his non-alignment strategy became the dominant ethos of India's foreign policy in international affairs. He promoted the idea of non-alignment to prove that India was an independent country and had a right to play an international role.

However, the Sino-Indian war of 1962 was a watershed for Indian defense planners. In the aftermath, India abandoned its cherished non-alignment policy; cast off the Menon defense strategy, which had left the Indian army helpless before the Chinese invasion; and set out a comprehensive program for military modernization with the help of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. New Delhi's military weaknesses had been exposed and in military defeat the country's international prestige declined.

Nehru's foreign policy based “on global influence without military power” was shattered and India's position and influence among the new non-aligned nations were also affected. Nehru categorically wrote in April 1963 that India's responses would inevitably be affected by the policies that others adopted toward it. He argued that protection of the country's interest, by force if necessary, was the first change on India’s foreign policy.

One of the challenges of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 21st century has been to reassess its identity and purpose in the post-Cold War era.

It is argued that since the movement was conceived avoid Cold War politics, the end of the Cold War effectively removes the need for the continued existence of the movement.

It can be counter-argued that the movement was initiated to combat the conditions of the Cold War which included neo-colonial pressures upon the former colonies, and many of those conditions still exist, an example of which can be seen in hegemony of the USA in international forums like the United Nations Organization.

Those who doubt its validity must contemplate why what began with a modest membership of 25 is able to boast of a membership of 120 today? Why it that many that opted for alignment has come round to adopt Non-Alignment approach?

Besides, the objectives of the NAM, which were to create an international atmosphere conducive for the growth and development of newly freed nations, and to provide an independent voice in the international arena is still exist.

If the validity of the creations of the Cold War era has expired, then it can be argued that the NATO, which was designed to counter the communist revolution of the time, should not continue either.

The movement has continued to advocate for international cooperation, multilateralism, and national self-determination, but it has also been increasingly vocal against the inequities of the world economic order.
Perhaps the most important role for NAM today lies in framing a concrete economic agenda for a just and fair international economic order. The globalization and liberalization trends worldwide have generated complex economic problems. The rich-poor divide has widened. The WTO rules and procedures have failed to provide adequate economic gains to the Third World. WTO summits have failed to reach a consensus on many issues. NAM has an effective role to play in this regard. Non-aligned nations role in WTO negotiations to advance and protect the trading rights and opportunities of developing countries and in muscling up their negotiating position and skills would be the chief concerns.

However, it is obvious that India’s concepts of the manner in which international relations should be conducted, amassed of: Panchsheel, nonviolence, non-alignment, neutralism, cooperation with the United Nations, and compassion for freedom and equality for the peoples of Asia and of course the World.

Therefore, the philosophy of Non-aligned Movement created by Nehru, is as relevant as ever for the World.

Notes and References

[12] Ibid., p.739.


