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MALAYSIA'S ROLE IN INVIGORATING NAM'S BANDUNG SPIRIT

It has been argued that the end of the Cold War signaled the waning influence of Non-Align Movement (NAM). NAM had been considered a third force during the Cold War rivalry between two superpowers but after the war the movement appeared to lose its momentum and failed to achieve the aspirations of the Bandung Spirit conference of 1955, which called for political cooperation among newly independent Asian and African countries. This article discusses to what extent the Bandung spirit continues to inspire the NAM's struggle for self-respect and self-determination among developing countries post-Cold War and analyses the major challenges NAM faces in reviving its status as a respected international organization representing developing countries in the current unipolar international political system. Finally, the article explores Malaysia's part in reinvigorating the Bandung spirit among NAM member countries since the 1997 Kuala Lumpur Summit.

Keywords: *Non-align Movement (NAM), Bandung Conference, South-South Cooperation, Malaysia*

Introduction

When twenty-nine countries from the Asian and African continents convened in Bandung in 1955, their vision was to establish a third influential force in an international system which was very much dominated by political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. This third force which was later known as the Non-Align Movement (NAM), strove to develop commonalities and a shared awareness amongst its member countries. It represented not only the interests of newly independent countries, but also those of the socialists who wanted to break free from the Soviet sphere of influence. Hence, since its formal inception in 1961, the movement has focused on national struggles for independence from colonial governments, the eradication of poverty and economic development, as well as neo-colonialism and imperialism. The end of the Cold War, however, raised some very fundamental questions about NAM's continued relevancy. Indeed, NAM's agenda seemed unable to cope with the deep changes affecting the international environment during the mid-twentieth century.

Another pertinent question is whether NAM has managed to live up to

the objectives laid out by the Bandung Spirit initiative in its desire to strengthen developing countries' position post-Cold War. In the sixty years and more since the Bandung gathering, critics have argued that the spirit of Bandung appears to have been largely ineffectual. The movement has provided little in the way of international cohesion as the founding members had envisaged and many of Bandung's members were unable to avoid aligning with one or more international superpowers. Most recently, the movement appears to have been struggling to find political credence in an era dominated by the demands of globalization. This fact has led to several member countries, including for example Malta and Cyprus, deciding to withdraw from the movement.

Over the past decade however, there have been several attempts to revive the aspirations of Bandung. During the NAM conference held in Kuala Lumpur in 2003, for instance, Malaysian participants attempted to revitalize the Bandung spirit by giving greater emphasis to the idea of a strategic alliance among developing countries threatened by the processes of globalization. Malaysia, under the then Mahathir administration, actively promoted the spirit of Bandung in NAM in an effort to reverse a seeming drift away from its forefathers' aspirations. As the chair of NAM between 2003 and 2006, Malaysia was also entrusted with certain responsibilities that included promoting the principles and activities of the movement. Furthermore, based on the concept of Troika, Malaysia was also empowered to act as a "clearing house for solutions of problems and issues confronting developing countries on which the movement must take a position."¹

The revitalization process was also put on the main agenda during the 2009 NAM meeting held in Egypt. Member countries led by the Cuban President Raul Castro called for a new international financial system to shield developing nations from the global recession. He argued that "more must be done to protect the economies of developing nations and give them a bigger say."² As a result, one of the summit's resolutions was a call for the group to coordinate with China – then attending the summit as an observer – to have their voice heard by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Later, during the 2012 NAM Summit in Tehran, the reinvigoration of NAM through consolidation and enhanced cooperation was one of the major issues raised. The spirit of Bandung and Belgrade were explicitly mentioned in the joint declaration of the 2012 summit, as was a reaffirmation of the continued "relevance of NAM" and its efforts to enhance cooperation among member countries.³

The major focus of this article is, therefore, to analyze the extent to which the Bandung spirit has inspired and revitalized the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)'s struggle for self-respect and self-determination among developing countries in the post-Cold War period. The article also analyses the problems and challenges in bringing back NAM as a respected international organization, one that could represent the concerns of developing countries

in the current unipolar international political system. Finally, the article also discusses Malaysia's role in reinvigorating the Bandung spirit in NAM during its chairmanship between 2003 and 2006. Although Malaysia could not bring structural changes in NAM, this article will argue that NAM and Malaysia played a pivotal role during this period in international politics, especially in the light of unilateral decisions by the United States (US) and its allies to undermine the United Nations (UN) credibility.⁴ Iraq is a case in point. In other words, the 120-member countries of NAM could provide a political counterbalance against US unilateralism.

Roads to Afro-Asian Camaraderie

At the turn of twentieth century, the idea of 'the oneness of Asia', an 'Asian personality' or 'Afro-Asian solidarity' was indivisible in the political radar of newly independent countries in Asia and Africa. India, together with several other countries including Egypt, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, took the lead in calling for the unity of peoples of both continents (Bhushan 1976). Several meetings were held during the height of the colonial period with the aim of consolidating the spirit of Afro-Asian camaraderie against Western imperialism. The concept was floated at the non-governmental as well as at the governmental level. The Bierville Congress in France in 1926, for instance, was among the first meetings at the non-governmental level in promoting the idea of Afro-Asian solidarity. This meeting was organized by Asian student movements in Europe and led by a young Hatta (Indonesia), K.M Panikkar (India), Duong Van Gio (Vietnam) and many others. This meeting, among others, called for the liberation of the Asian spirit and the condemnation of imperialism and oppression in Asia.

The post Second World War period presented a new and different framework for action by poor and newly independent countries. Wartime experiences and independence for many former colonies had widened perspectives on imperialism. The UN was a promising venue for the newly independent states to seek a forum for the continuity of expression and collective action, although the general attitude towards the idea was ambiguous. Member countries were in fact torn between the possibility of using the organization as an instrument towards their political ends, or of superseding it as their own autonomous organization. Afro-Asian states' first attempt to bolster multilateral contacts and achieve greater cohesion through international gatherings such as the Asian Relations Conference at New Delhi in 1947 gained few positive results, despite being organized by non-government groups with the full support of the newly independent Afro-Asian countries (Williams 1981:47-48).

The Western imperial powers, as expected, were doubtful of Afro-Asian cooperation and consolidation. Nonetheless, this provided momentum

for the newly independent Afro-Asian countries to unite in the face of Western skepticism. Nehru of India, for example, mooted the idea of an Asian common platform that could boost strong political and economic ties across the continent. The platform emphasized the importance of collective efforts among Asian countries to defend themselves against the predicted future expansion of Western power (Bushan 1976).

The idea of an Asian common platform and collective effort was expounded at the first governmental level conference of Asian countries, which was again held in New Delhi in 1949. The conference was largely a response to Dutch action against Indonesia in 1947, an "... Asian riposte to a flagrant attack made" by the colonial powers (Bushan 1976:40). Later, in 1954, five leading newly independent Asian countries—Indonesia, India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar), and Pakistan—met in Colombo to prepare for the first ever summit of Afro-African countries. The countries involved were concerned with the development of the ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their major focus was the situation in Indo-China. Nehru, for instance, slammed the US's anti-communism campaign as a platform for consolidating Western colonialism. This condemnation was in response to the United States's plan to create a new military alliance in Southeast Asia, which in fact led to the formation of the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in Manila on 8 September 1954. The five-country meeting then proposed Bandung in Indonesia to stage an Afro-Asian Summit to develop joint policies in the international relations of newly independent countries.

The resultant Bandung Conference, held in 1955, brought together the leaders of mostly former colonies, also known as Third World countries, from two continents of Africa and Asia. It was a venue to form a strategic partnership and a vehicle to enable the countries of Asia and Africa to bridge gaps for their mutual benefit and to promote peace, prosperity and progress in the two regions. It was seen as a milestone of diplomacy and a natural postscript to the developing countries' anti-colonial struggle (Vatikiotis 1996:174). For a brief moment, "atavistic nationalism and ideology were cast aside in favor of solidarity and brotherhood" (Vatikiotis 1996:174).

Although the five states (Indonesia, India, Ceylon, Burma, and Pakistan) were instrumental in bringing Asian and African countries together for the first time in Bandung, it was Indonesia and India who played the leading role. India's dominance was the work of then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who worked to promote territorial integrity, policies of non-aggression and non-interference in domestic affairs, supporting equality and policies of mutual benefit. Finally, the concept of peaceful co-existence as the basis for partnership, which served as basis for the Sino-India relations, was incorporated into the Ten Principles of the Bandung Declaration. The spirit of Bandung Conference, as well as Nehru's non-alignment ideas, eventually became the basis of the Non-Aligned

Movement when it was formed in 1961 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

Post Bandung Developments and the South-South Problems

The 1955 Bandung conference was one of the first attempts by newly independent Asian and African countries to participate actively in international affairs. For centuries, the international system had been dominated by European powers who determined the future of world politics. To survive as a newly independent country within this hierarchical international system was not an easy task. It was further complicated by the ideological rivalry that developed over the 1950s and 1960s between the United States and Soviet Union. At the same time, nearly all the newly independent Asian or African countries were facing problems of legitimacy, domestic political-economic problems and external threats. Hence, it was hoped that a strategic alliance with similar nations would enable them to better weather domestic and international political uncertainties. The Bandung conference was anticipated to be the platform for providing political confidence and understanding among these countries and it was thus not surprising that the fears, anxieties and hopes of the so-called Third World countries were reflected in the Final Communiqué of the Conference.

The Final Communiqué entreated the participating countries to observe the rights of each individual country to remain free from mistrust and fear, to show goodwill towards each other, to practice tolerance, to live together in peace with one another as good neighbors and to develop friendly cooperation among one other regardless of political and ideological differences. Indeed, Matthew Quest has argued that Bandung “clearly helped to forge the modern identity politics of race, religion and nationality.”²⁵

The conference also laid down ten principles that could be seen as the foundation of future relations among participating countries. Nonetheless the idealism enshrined in the Principles was far from being achieved in the years to come. The first principle, for instance, emphasized respect for human rights and observance of UN principles but due recognition of those rights has not been observed. Indeed, many Third World Countries (now known as developing countries) have been not only the victims of, but also the proponents of human rights abuse over the twentieth century and today. In Chile, for example, thousands of Chileans sympathetic to the socialist government were detained, tortured, and several hundred were tried and executed by military war tribunals during the Pinochet period (1973-1990). In the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, one of the oldest conflicts in modern history, scores of human rights abuses were reported, and in Cambodia, thousands of innocent people were killed by the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979).

In addition, the principle of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations seemed to be inherently idealistic in the face of political

realities in a world where warfare has been, and is, part and parcel of developing countries' international politics. The Vietnam Civil War (1959-1975), Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia (1978-1989), and South Africa's military intervention in Botswana (1986) and Lesotho (1998) are all examples of continuous conflicts in developing countries. The call to respect justice and international obligation was also arguably observed by only the weaker powers and the major powers appeared to be the main perpetrators of the erosion and violation of international laws. The Iraqi invasion by the United States and its allies in 2003 is a classic example of a blatant use of force in international politics.

Developing countries problems were further compounded by colonial legacies and the problems of creating a political identity and establishing political integrity. As the colonial powers left, these newly independent countries had to struggle to unite often very diverse societies. As a result, some of these new established nations disintegrated into civil war, such as in Rwanda, Congo, and the Philippines.

In spite of such issues, the spirit of Bandung, as articulated by the Ten Principles of the Final Communiqué, has enhanced mutual interest and cooperation among developing countries. The idea of peaceful coexistence has succeeded in containing some inter-state conflicts from developing into major wars. This can be seen in the "Konfrontasi" between Malaysia and Indonesia in 1965. Furthermore, the Association of Southeast Asian countries (ASEAN) is a unique example of the successful application of the policy of non-intervention and non-interference, as embodied in Bandung's Communiqué. Although the policy of non-interference has been heavily criticized by the West, ASEAN has strengthened solidarity and managed to avoid open confrontation among member countries.

The idea of non-alignment was also developed further after the Bandung Conference. A preparatory meeting for the First NAM Summit Conference was held in Cairo, from 5-12 June 1961. The conference was in fact the first official so-called South-south countries gathering to unite all newly independent countries from being slipped into camps of North and South rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union. At the Cairo meeting, participating countries discussed in detail the principal aims and objectives of the policy of non-alignment. The first Conference of Non-Aligned Heads of State or Government, at which twenty-five countries were represented, was convened at Belgrade in September 1961, largely through the initiative of Yugoslavian President Tito. One of the conference's immediate concerns was the accelerating arms race between the Soviet Union and the US. The concept of non-alignment was seen a way for the Third World countries to avoid being caught-up in the confrontation.

NAM and the Politics of Developing Countries

For a period of twenty-eight years from its inception and throughout the Cold War period, NAM was arguably relatively successful in keeping its member countries from becoming directly involved in the ideological warfare between the Soviet Union and the US. Member countries had concentrated their efforts on the struggle for liberation and self-determination, the pursuit of world peace, and the search for a more equitable and just global order.¹² Throughout that period, the movement represented the views and interests of developing countries and played a significant role in international affairs, especially within the United Nations, during the Cold War period.

Four aspects of collaboration were emphasized by the movement. First was political, where emphasis was placed on finding peaceful solutions to major conflicts as enunciated at the Bandung Conference. Second was economic: the desire to attain a just and equitable international economic order by providing opportunities for development and economic prosperity among member countries. The third emphasized the importance of collaboration in socio-cultural activities by promoting confidence building among member states and, finally to encouraged member countries to become more competitive in the international world by the enhanced use of science and technology.

Since the end of the Cold War, NAM member countries have consistently made a high profile argument to challenge multilateralism in international affairs and the restructuring of the United Nations, which could have a major impact on developing countries. The major political contention discussed in the 12th and 13th NAM Summit in Durban, South Africa (1998) and Putrajaya, Malaysia (2003), for instance, centered on the call for the United Nations to hasten its plan for reform in order to strengthen its structure. In addition, both summits also rejected the notion of unilateralism in international politics. NAM further reemphasized this call during the G77 plus China Summit in Doha, Qatar in June 2005 by issuing a joint declaration for their rejection of unilateralism which the movement argued “could lead to the erosion and violation of international law.”¹⁶ The statement also denounced the use of, or threat of the use of force including unilateral sanctions by certain countries. The statement was clearly directed towards the US over the superpower's handling of the Iraq crisis. On the economic front, the 12th and 13th NAM Summits also deliberated issues including such as mounting external debt, trade and development, and monetary problems.

NAM has faced many major challenges in the post-Cold War period. One of them was the term ‘non-aligned’ itself. It was clear from the beginning that the idea of non-alignment had nothing to do with the idea of neutrality or passivity. India and Egypt, Bhushan argues, were “non-aligned but not neutral”, for example. This claim was based on Nehru's argument that “where freedom is menaced or justice threatened” one cannot become neutral (Bhushan 1976:62).

Despite this, NAM has grown into a powerful movement which contributed to the maintenance of world peace through much of the Cold War period, capable of remaining a neutral block despite the complicated international situation.

Some critics have also argued that NAM ceased to be relevant once the Cold War ended. NAM was considered only “a tactic, not a philosophy”, a “Cold War diplomatic skill” for Third World countries to avoid being trapped in an ideological collision between two superpowers.⁷ Certainly, it can be argued that NAM’s influence seemed to wane, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and that NAM was only capable of uniting member countries during the Cold War period because of the perception of a common threat. A major question for NAM is thus whether the movement has the capability to maintain unity amid the challenges of globalization and possible threat from the political domination of a superpower in an international unipolar system? Another pertinent question is how far the voice of developing countries can influence the opinions of the global community? Furthermore, how does NAM differ from Group 77 in representing the voice and interest of developing countries under current international structures?⁸

It cannot be denied that there are other competing international movements and organizations that represent the interest of developing countries. The Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC), for instance, is a loosely organized movement under the auspices of the UN that aims to strengthen economic collaboration “whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual or collective development through cooperative exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how.”⁹ Group 77 too, is a movement which provides the means to developing countries “to articulate and promote its collective economic interests and enhance its joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues in the United Nations system, and promote economic and technical cooperation among developing countries.” The TCDC and Group 77 have different objectives but act as conduits in enhancing socio-economic cooperation in developing countries. NAM, however, goes beyond socio-economic cooperation to include politics as part of the movement’s struggle for a just and equitable world. Therefore, NAM has a unique identity and function in representing the voices and concerns of developing countries in the current unipolar system.

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia’s Prime Minister between 1981 and 2003, in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2003 said that NAM was still relevant in raising issues such as bridging the gap between rich and poor. But NAM, he argued, must have the political will to unite all member countries. At the WTO meeting in Cancun, Mexico, September 2003 he argued, NAM’s developing countries could have worked together for their own good. The richer nations were trying to impose their will on the poorer nations for market access, yet they did not want to offer anything in return, such as abolishing agriculture subsidies in their own countries. Dr.

Mahathir countered that developing countries would experience similar strong pressures in the days ahead and should help each other to withstand external stress.¹⁰

Yet to maintain and to strengthen its political relevancy in the post-Cold War period, NAM needs, as Bandoro (1992:2) points out, to “improve the efficiency of internal functions in order to support its external action.” The South-south cooperation idea under NAM needs to obtain consensus and commitment to the call for resources. Uneven economic levels make it difficult for very poor developing countries to commit themselves to the idea, whereas, more developed developing countries are impatient with slow development.

Cooperation and collaboration depend not only on member countries' need to overcome economic problems but also “to which the development policies themselves create conditions for meaningful cooperation” either at bilateral, sub-regional, regional or inter-regional level (Bandoro 1992:3). Hence, it can be argued that intra-regional cooperation is more conducive in bringing more assertive action toward mutual cooperation among developing countries. NAM then has to double its efforts to achieve more regional collaboration under its auspices.

One may argue that NAM's role might be taken over by the G20 platform. The G20, which consists of twenty major economies in the developed and developing world, has been seen as an influential arena for cooperation and consultation pertaining to international economic and financial issues. The group is said to control eighty percent of world's economy.¹¹ Yet, although NAM's also concentrates on financial and economic issues, the movement is more interested in how developing countries cope and integrate with the fierce challenges of globalization process, thus NAM still has a function in today's world.

This is because poverty is still the major trademark of NAM member countries but also in other intra-regional groupings of developing countries. Sixty years on from the Bandung conference, the dependency syndrome of the South-North still exists. The South still owes the North billion of dollars. The decision by members of developed countries, as the G7 Group, to write off the debts of nearly twenty-seven less developed countries amounting to fifty-two billion dollars has not ended the dependency syndrome (*New Straits Times* 14 June 2005:16). A question remains: how to break this dependency syndrome when corruption and political mismanagement are still rampant in the developing countries? Double efforts must be made to rebalance the distribution of global resources. For instance, although the developing countries hold the majority of the world's natural resources, it has been the north that controls two-thirds of the global wealth.

Malaysia and NAM in the Historical Context

Malaysia is a late comer to the idea of Afro-Asian cooperation and solidarity. When Malaya gained its independence in 1957, the focus and the direction of the country's foreign policy with respect to questions of defense and security displayed a distinctly pro-West, and concomitantly an anti-communist posture, "tempered by a rather ineffectual attempt toward neutrality or what would be more correctly described as a posture of non-interference" (Johan Saravanamuttu 1983:26). As a newly independent nation, it was expected that post-colonial foreign policy should be freed from any overdue influence from its former colonial power. But the first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman's, explicit anti-communist attitude was clearly evident in the country's formulation of foreign policy and the country's relations with great Western powers. Malaya, for instance, was a member of the Anglo-Malayan Defense Arrangement (AMDA), which stated that Australia, Britain and New Zealand would provide defense aid and assistance to Malaya and Singapore in the event of an armed attack. In 1958 the Tunku also told parliament most insistently that "there is no question whatsoever of our adopting a neutral-policy while Malaya is at war with the Communists" (Johan Saravanamuttu 1983:26). Communism was seen as the biggest threat to the survival of the young and fragile country.

But a shift in Malay(si)an foreign policy was unavoidable after the formation of Malaysia, uniting Singapore and Borneo's states of Sabah and Sarawak as one new independent entity. Malaysia's formation was greatly opposed by Indonesia and later by Philippines. As both countries regarded the move as part of Malaysia's (and Britain's) "neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist" agenda in the region, and embarked upon a policy of *Konfrontasi* (confrontation). At the same time, Malaysia also lost support from Third World countries during the *Konfrontasi*, due to its strong pro-Western policy. The non-aligned countries were unhappy with Malaysia, especially after its failure to vote with the neutralist countries at the United Nations, which planned to propose compromise resolutions on the question of disarmament. Malaysia was also not among the fourteen-neutralist countries that drafted a resolution calling for immediate discontinuance of nuclear tests until an agreement was reached by the states concerned on the controls necessary to ensure the end of such tests.

It can be argued that the *Konfrontasi* brought about a softening of Malaysia's hard-line anti-communist policy in the long run. The Indonesian, and to some extent the Philippines, military and diplomatic offensive nudged "the thus far cautious Malaysia into a concerted diplomatic drive to win friends in Afro-Asia, and later Eastern Europe as well" (Johan Saravanamuttu 1983:26). Malaysia's failure to join NAM in the Cairo Summit, largely because of Indonesian opposition, prompted the Tunku to quickly declare that Malaysia has fulfilled the criteria of non-alignment by endorsing the

Declaration of the Cairo conference on the principles of peaceful co-existence (Johan Saravanamuttu 1983:72). Malaysian efforts were then successful in sparking off “a diplomatic counter-offensive, which won Malaysia the recognition of a number of African and Asian countries and eventually support from twenty-eight countries to attend the subsequent conference at Algiers” (Johan Saravanamuttu 1983:26).

The weakening of Malaysia's pro-Western policy was further reinforced by political maneuvering within the ruling party UMNO and parliament, which demanded the Tunku administration to reposition Malaysian foreign policy towards Third World countries. Hence when Tun Abdul Razak took the helm of premiership from Tunku in 1970, the idea of non-alignment and neutralization had already taken shape within Malaysian foreign policy (Ahmad Faiz 2005:16). As a result, Malaysia not only established diplomatic relations with other Asian and the Commonwealth countries, but also with countries in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa. During this period, Malaysia was also accepted as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and was the first among Southeast Asian countries (and ahead of the United States) in forging diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1974.

Malaysia's foreign policy in the post-Tunku period was closely associated with national and regional security issues. Hence, the priorities of Malaysian diplomatic relations, under the Tun Abdul Razak administration and later under the brief Tun Hussein Onn administration, began to focus on its relationships with Southeast Asian countries. As one of the founding members of ASEAN, Malaysia's involvement in the regional affairs was further evident when the country took a lead in advocating the proposed Southeast Asia's Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). ZOPFAN has been a core part of the region's strength and resilience to manage crisis or potential crisis.

The “foundations of Malaysian foreign policy had already been laid” when Dr Mahathir Mohamad took over the premiership from Tun Hussein Onn in 1981 (Ahmad Faiz 2005:18). At the same time, the Malaysian economy experienced a period of boom while internal security became less of a major concern. The favorable political environment enabled Dr Mahathir to focus more on external matters. Like Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn, Mahathir also focused on ASEAN as a focus of Malaysian foreign policy. Nonetheless, Dr Mahathir also went beyond traditional Malaysian diplomatic relations by giving equal emphasis to South-south cooperation, emphasizing Malaysia's active involvement in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), G15 and G77 Groups. The Commonwealth became the last priority of the Mahathir administration.

As a result, Malaysia's relationship with other developing South-south countries and organizations strengthened. Furthermore, the Mahathir administration, as part of its support for South-south co-operation began to

boldly articulate at the international level “some of the grievances and issues in North-South relations and to fight against the unjust treatment faced by Third World countries” (Ahmad Faiz 2005:18-19). Malaysia, therefore, has then openly identified itself with the developing countries’ concerns and aspirations. The administration has moved from a position of non-alignment to one that emphasizes solidarity in developing countries.

Malaysia and South-South Cooperation

It can be argued that the South-south cooperation has become the major hallmark of Malaysian diplomatic relations since the Mahathir administration. Malaysia has shown its support to the idea of South-south cooperation by organizing and actively participating in all South-south mechanisms such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Group of 77 (G77), the South Commission, and the Summit Level Group for South-South Consultation and Cooperation (the G15). Malaysia was the host for the South-South Conference II and the Second Meeting of the South Commission in 1986 and 1987, respectively. In 1990, Malaysia was the host for the first meeting of the heads of state and government of the G15, and in November 1997, Kuala Lumpur was the host of the sixth G15 Summit (Ahmad Faiz 2005:69).

Malaysia has also embarked upon small-scale projects to fellow developing countries under the South-south mechanism by providing assistance in areas such as managing national economic policy, human resources and information technology; privatization; and investment promotion. During the Second International South-South Conference, jointly organized by the Third World Foundation and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia (ISIS) in May 1986, several resolutions were also adopted to explore the possibilities of establishing Dr Mahathir’s idea of a south commission. Dr Mahathir was also instrumental in organizing the Langkawi Dialogue, which aimed to bolster the South-south dialogue and to increase trade relations within developing countries.

What is interesting is that the Mahathir administration not only developed broad and credible relationships through bilateral and multilateral linkages with new trading partners in Africa, Latin America, Central America, Central Asia, Indochina and the South Pacific, but it also attempted to reinvigorate the role of international organizations representing the interest of developing countries—particularly NAM—by emphasizing the economic development and management of its human resources for achieving sustainable development in individual countries (Ahmad Faiz 2005:6). Under the South-south technical assistant mechanism, for instance, Malaysia has offered the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Program (MTCP). The program was in response to the Joint Communiqué of the Commonwealth Heads of Government of the Asian and Pacific Regional Meeting (CHOGRM) held

in Sydney in 1978. It began with giving technical assistance to neighboring countries, and has since been expanded to include all the major regions of the world. The MTCP program covers project-type assistance to developing countries in transition, such as Timor Leste. Many developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America have also benefited from the MTCP. It expanded from one technical institute offering courses to officials from the ASEAN member countries to 34 institutes offering 122 training programs to 135 countries.¹² The MTCP also embodies the spirit of smart partnership. The private sector has been encouraged to provide training as well as to play a catalytic role in the promotion of trade and investments in new and emerging markets.

Another of Malaysia's contributions is the Malaysian South-South Corporation (MASSCORP) established in 1992; a consortium comprising 85 Malaysian shareholders that link Malaysia and other southern countries. The MASSCORP has so far acted as a vehicle for the promotion of trade, exports and investments as well as the transfer of technical and management expertise to host developing countries.¹³

Thus far, it can be argued that Mahathir's idiosyncrasy has contributed to Malaysia's active role in reviving South-South co-operation. He has been known for his anti-western rhetoric and has gained respect as a spokesman for the South, sometimes referred to as "little Sukarno." Mahathir's dynamic role in championing the south may be partly due to the fact that there was lack of dominant leaders in developing countries. International cooperation among developing countries, particular to that of economic relations, requires leadership by a dominant power in developing countries (Ahmad Faiz 2005:118-120). Sauviant further argues that although some developing countries such as India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or Venezuela often played important roles in many issues pertaining to developing countries, none of them dominated the group (Sauviant 1981:9).

One reason for the lack of dominant leaders is reliance on economic aid from the north, that can affected the potential power of a developing country. Malaysia has been so far able to play a dominant role for the reason that it has independent economic growth and political stability, and at the same time is not bound to aid from the north.

Malaysia continues to show its commitment to South-south cooperation even in the post-Mahathir era. In 2009, for instance, Malaysia's Prime Minister, Najib Razak announced the setting up of the Unesco—Malaysia Cooperative Trust Fund "...with a launching grant of US\$5mil (RM17.15mil) to enhance south-south cooperation."¹⁴ The contribution also came with an annual US\$ million to assist and support capacity building activities in the Least Developing Countries particularly Africa and the Small Island States.

Malaysia's Role as the Chairman of NAM

Malaysia (then Malaya) was an unborn nation when the Bandung conference was held. It was also not invited to attend the first NAM Conference in Belgrade due to the *Konfrantasi* it then faced with Indonesia (the major proponent of NAM) and its then pro-Western and anti-Communist policies. Yet four decades later, Malaysia became the chairman of NAM when the country hosted the 13th Summit in 2003.

Taking its queue from the 12th Summit in Durban, South Africa, the major debates at the Kuala Lumpur NAM Summit focused on challenges to multilateralism in international affairs, and the issue of UN reformation and restructuring. In its call for the UN reform, Malaysia (in its role as NAM chairman) demanded the expansion of UN Security Council permanent members to include countries from developing nations. It was also envisaged that NAM and Group 77 (G-77) would speak with one voice in calling for reforms of the UN Security Council. The UN reform proposal was in fact discussed further at the G77 plus China Summit in Doha, Qatar from 15 -17 June 2005 (*Business Times* 14 June 2005:B17).

The G77 plus China Summit was also an avenue where NAM member countries pressed for debt restructuring from developed nations (*New Straits Times* 15 June 2005:25). The issue of an AS\$ 40 billion debt cancellation, which dominated the summit, was expected to benefit the poorest countries of NAM and G-77. According to the then Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar, sustainable development and debt cancellation had long been an important issue to NAM. Therefore the decision of G8 members to cancel the debt of poor countries was an achievement for NAM and G-77.¹⁵ Debt cancellation had happened before, but the G8 decision was historic because it applied to the major multilateral lending agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, whereas earlier measures were on the part of individual creditor nations themselves. The measures were seen as a major step toward addressing the crippling burden of poorer developing countries un-payable loans.¹⁶ The Final Communiqué of the NAM Summit in Kuala Lumpur has been hailed as a blueprint for the future of the organization. It provides clear guiding principles and a political action plan to assist NAM's future causes.

The immediate task among member countries at the summit was the resolution of the conflict in the Middle East specifically the Palestine issue, and the possibility and consequences of a US-led military attack on Iraq. The anti-war sentiment was indeed high during the summit. Dr. Mahathir even urged that "war be made illegal" (*New Straits Times* 28 February 28 2003:12).

There was wide support among member countries to discuss the Arab-Palestine issue. The South African High Commissioner to Malaysia, Dr. Abraham S. Nkomo, for instance, argued that that there was an urgent

need to place the Palestinian cause back on top of the international agenda. He furthermore said that: "We need to mobilize the international community. Although the Palestinians constitute a just cause, it is my opinion that they have lost the propaganda war to those supporting Israel." Nkomo said that the 119 NAM countries needed to rectify the situation by highlighting the plight of the Palestinians in international forums. NAM has been given a crucial role to initiate a "people-centered campaign to heighten international support for the Palestinians" (*New Straits Times* 28 February 28 2003:12).

The Palestine issue continued to dominate NAM's agenda in the 15th and 16th Summits in Cairo and Tehran respectively.¹⁷

The Middle Eastern issue was deliberated further at the meeting of NAM's Foreign Ministers, held in Kuala Lumpur on May 13 2004, where it was agreed that a stand should be taken on the deteriorating situation in Palestine. A statement issued as a result complemented the position of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) special meeting on the same issue. The OIC meeting decided, among other things, that Malaysia would lead a five-member delegation of foreign ministers (Palestine, Morocco, Turkey and Senegal) to meet the International Quartet (the US, European Union and Russia) to revive the peace process (*New Straits Times* 28 April 2004:5).

Malaysia's stand at the meeting of the NAM Foreign Ministerial Meeting on the Middle Eastern issue was not, nonetheless, in favor of economic sanctions against Israel. Malaysia and some other member countries believe that a solution to the Palestinian conflict could only be reached through constructive engagement and negotiation. The sanction, according to the Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar would not bring immediate benefit to the Palestinians (*New Straits Times* 11 May 2004:2), instead, the Palestinian issue needs a political solution in the context of world peace and security. As chairman of NAM, Malaysia also argued that the only countries that may do so would be those outside the region, i.e. non-Arab Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Yet, countries in the Middle East should not, nevertheless, think of severing diplomatic relations with Israel "at least in the sense of a confidence-building measure for the Palestinians" (*New Straits Times* 11 May 2004:2).

At the same time, Malaysia was reluctant to propose any trade boycott against the United States-Israel's chief supporter. Malaysia believed this could not work since the US is the largest trading nation in the world. What would work against Israel's failure to adhere to UN regulations was, as Malaysia argued, international political and diplomatic pressure. Malaysia even suggested a monitoring force so that the two sides, the Israeli and Palestinian could be separated (*New Straits Times* 11 May 2004:2).

As NAM chairman, Malaysia wanted the Palestinian issue to gain a momentum akin to that of anti-apartheid movement.

The NAM Ministerial Meeting on the Middle East also called for

NAM member countries to condemn the ill treatment of Iraqi prisoners by the US-led occupying forces in Iraq. Malaysia issued a statement claiming that it was clear that US troops had been involved in the practice of torture that breached international law and angered the global community. NAM viewed the attitude of the occupying forces as condescending and showed disrespect towards the Iraqi people (*New Straits Times* 6 May 2004:4).

Nonetheless, the larger issue for NAM, it can be argued, is not in the realm of politics, but economics. To attain a just and equitable international economic order requires members of NAM to create their own bargaining power through economic reformation, improved efficiency and the creation of a conducive and healthy economic environment to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).¹⁸ There is still lack of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involvement in the South-south cooperation. It has been suggested that NAM members should provide funding for International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to act as a second tier and a pressure group representing the interests of member countries.

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who took over the Malaysian premiership from Mahathir, in addressing the Second South Summit of the Group of 77 (G-77) plus China in his capacity as the then chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), called for developing countries to play a more prominent role in the international trading system by reaffirming their commitment to promote and strengthen South-south co-operation. The call, he argues, was not just rhetorical, as past experience in South-south co-operation had helped bring more marginalized countries into the mainstream of the international trading system. Citing Malaysia's experience as an example, Abdullah argued that trade volume between Malaysia and ASEAN members as a group had expanded by 174.8 per cent in the ten years between 1994 and 2004. Trade between Malaysia and China, for example, grew by 726 per cent, and with India by 563 per cent, during the same period. Malaysia's trade with Africa totaled US\$1.1 billion in 2001 and rose to US\$7.8 billion in 2011.¹⁸ Malaysia also proposed instruments of cooperation, including the formation of the South Investment, Trade and Technology Data Exchange Center (SITTDEC), and the Bilateral Payment Arrangement (BPA) to facilitate trade among NAM countries. Hence, it can be argued that Malaysia's active involvement in NAM continued in the post-Mahathir era.

Conclusion

Since the Kuala Lumpur NAM summit, Cuba (2006-2009) and Egypt (2009-2012) and Iran (2009-2012), have held a rotational three-year chairmanship of the movement. The next summit is scheduled to be held in Venezuela in 2015. Yet the debates over the relevancy of NAM, its struggle as an alternative avenue for developing countries' voices in world politics continues. Since

its inception, NAM has proved its effectiveness as a political and strategic movement yet in the post-Cold War era, challenges to its existence need more than political remedies. The current political scenario requires NAM to address the effects of globalization on developing countries, imbalances in the international economic system, and the need to reform international financial architecture. NAM also needs to play a positive role in identifying international trade, external debts, upgrading technology, eradicating poverty and strengthening South-south co-operation as priorities (*New Straits Times* 16 June 2004:2). The 13th NAM Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 2003 was seen as a launch pad for greater cooperation among member countries.

Malaysia seems to have played an active role in invigorating NAM's Bandung spirit. It can be argued that Dr Mahathir Mohamad used the Kuala Lumpur Summit to revive the Bandung's spirit. During Malaysia's chairmanship of NAM, concerted efforts were made to open up more political, economic and social communication and cooperation among member countries. What is more important is that the subsequent summits also show increasing efforts by member states to boost NAM's political image. For quite some time, NAM member countries tended to ignore the potential of South-South trade and investment in their efforts to secure an economic footing in the increasingly saturated markets of advanced countries. Yet, many NAM member countries are in fact leaders in various sectors such as petrochemicals, oil and gas. There are many possibilities for linkages and synergies in such areas (*New Straits Times* 16 June 2004:2).

Nonetheless, NAM also cannot run away from addressing pressing international political issues. It can be argued that the current unipolar structure of international politics warrants an urgent response from the movement to prevent certain countries, particularly the United States, to become a domineering power. To achieve this objective, political solidarity and economic cooperation among member countries, as conceived under the Bandung spirit, are the essential ingredients for NAM.

End Notes

1. See The Official Web-site of The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) - The Non-Aligned Movement: Description and History, Online, <http://www.nam.gov.za>. (Accessed January 14, 2011).
2. Non-Aligned summit opens in Egypt, *Star Online Edition*, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/7/15/apworld/20090715204057&sec=apworld> (11 January 2011).
3. Tehran Declaration 30-31 August 2012.
4. See Editorial Opinion, *Star Online Edition* (South Africa 26 February), <http://www.thestar.co.za/index.php?fSectionId=225&fArticleId=52486> (Accessed December 13 2012).

5. Mathew Quest, The Lessons of the Bandung Conference: Reviewing Richard Wright's *The Color Curtain* 40 Years Later, Online, <http://www.spunk.org/library/pubs/1r/sp001716/bandung.html> (Accessed June 17, 2012).
6. Non-Aligned Movement Wants UN Reforms to Shun Unilateralism, *Hindustan Times*. On-Line Edition, June 13 2005, http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/181_1398044,00050004.htm. (Accessed on December 10 2012).
7. Mathew Quest, The Lessons of the Bandung Conference, Online, (Accessed June 17, 2012).
8. Please see the discussion on NAM's direction and political influence in among others, Ogilvie-White (2007: 453-476); and Morphet (2004: 517-537).
9. United Nations Development Programme, Online, <http://tcdc.undp.org/faq.asp#g77> (Accessed on December 10 2012).
10. "Dr. M: United Nations probably at lowest point in 20 years" *New Straits Times*, September 27, 2003.
11. No Clear Accord on Stimulus by Top 20 Industrial Nations". *The New York Times*. March 15, 2009. p. A1
12. "Call to reaffirm commitment," *New Straits Times*, June 16, 2005, 2.
13. Speech by the H.E. Ambassador Rastam Mohd Isa, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations at the *High Level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries*, New York, Tuesday, May 27 2003.
14. "Unesco-Malaysia trust fund to enhance south-south cooperation," *Star Online Edition*, October 7, 2009, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/10/7/nation/4854892&sec=nation> (Accessed March 3, 2013).
15. According to Syed Hamid Albar, although majority of NAM members is members of G-77, the objective of both organizations differs as NAM emphasized more on the political approach, whereas G-77 emphasized more on economic cooperation between developing and developed countries. The G-77 has been tackling economic development since its inception in 1964. G-77 objective is to consolidate South-South cooperation in the economic, social and ecological sectors in order to achieve development
16. The G-77 is the largest Third World coalition, tackling economic development since its establishment in June 1964 by 77 developing nations. It provides a means for the developing world to articulate and promote collective economic interests, and enhance joint negotiating capacity or all major international economic issues in the UN system. It also seeks to promote economic and technical co-operation among developing countries (*New Straits Times* 13 June 2005:18).

- 17 "Tehran NAM summit concludes with final documents stressing peace," September 1, 2012, *XinhuaNews Online*, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c_123658481.htm (Accessed March 3, 2013)
18. Speech by Y.B. Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed Minister of International Trade and Industry at the Malaysia-Africa Business Forum, Putrajaya, June 18, 2011.

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