

NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT FROM BELGRADE 1989 TO BAKU 2019 30 YEARS OF TRANSFORMATION IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



Conference proceedings from October 7th 2019 in Belgrade

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Ambassador of Egypt, H.E. Amr Aljowaily and former Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Zivadin Jovanovic



**THE ‘WORKING’ NON-ALIGNED
MOVEMENT: BETWEEN BELGRADE,
CAIRO AND BAKU – THE NAM’S LEADER-
SHIP VISIBILITY**

H. E. Amr Aljowaily¹

Ambassador of Egypt to Serbia

I would like first of all to commend the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Belgrade for the initiative to convene this important conference titled “Non-Aligned Movement - From Belgrade 1989 to Baku 2019: 30 Years of Transformation in Uncertain Times” on October 7th in Belgrade. I also wish to extend warmest congratulations to the Republic of Azerbaijan for assuming the presidency of the Movement. There could not be a better start for the presidency than to review the recent history of the NAM, extracting the lessons learned and identifying the best practices.

I would also like to thank Ambassador Dragan Bisenic, a dear friend of Egypt, for the invitation to contribute to this valuable book through a short personal account stemming from my experience with the Non-Aligned Movement during my tenure as Council and Minister at the Egyptian Mission in New York. I am pleased to have this opportunity, not only for the reason that it brings back nostalgia of the rich experience of serving as a diplomat accredited to the United Nations, shar-

¹ **Amr Aljowaily** is Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Serbia. The author’s personal opinions and impressions resulting from almost 30 years of professional and academic experience with multilateralism. Any reference made to this contribution should bear in mind this highlighted context..

ing it with the readers, but also as I believe it may add a different, yet complementary, approach to viewing the role of the NAM in today's international relations.

The image of the NAM that resonates so swiftly in our minds is particularly that of world leaders in the 1960s onwards closely working together for a more participatory and just world order. Since I flew from Cairo to Belgrade, arriving as Ambassador of Egypt to Serbia, the photos of Nasser and Tito in government buildings and museums alike have been a constant reminder of the leadership role that both countries played in the founding and nurturing that diplomatic fervor that impacted forever the course of international relations. There is hardly a diplomatic function in which I represent, with full honors, my country unless the interlocutors recount their personal involvement or childhood memories of the leaders of both countries in their encounters through the NAM. A visit to the Serbian Mission to the United Nations by Central Park and almost midway between the East and Hudson Rivers on the Manhattan Island, or to the Serbian Embassy in Cairo almost on the shores of the Nile River on the Zamalek Island would quickly bear testimony to where the two leaders met, sat and chatted.

New York: The NAM is Working

While I have always been fascinated with this image of world leaders being so close together, assuming by their own hands the highest level of diplomatic engagement of the Non-Aligned Movement, I have never witnessed it myself, nor have I had the opportunity to participate in it first-hand. I have had however the chance to discover another dimension of the NAM in a much different context, more of the working level, and by consequence much less known. Global norms, standards, rules and even laws are negotiated and agreed in multilateral frameworks, namely the United Nations. While developing share generically many concerns and interests, they may lack the capacity to best defend their interest and promote their views individually, especially with the growing complexity of international relations and the increasing intensity of multilateral meetings. Groupings such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the G77 appear as a viable platform to aggregate interests, divide tasks and multiply impact. They do, hence, remain as relevant player in negotiating multilateral outcomes, thus contributing to the discourse on the issues and themes that are high on the agenda of international relations.

The usual format for such coordination of the NAM in New York are 'working groups', whose highlighting feature is that they benefit from the designation of a specific diplomatic mission of a Member of the Movement as Chair of the Group, permanently coordinating its activities and almost solely hosting its meetings, except for those that are held on UN premises. This endows such NAM coordination with the quality that may be most difficult for individual missions to enjoy which is institutional memory. Many, if not most, diplomatic services, especially those of developing countries, do not dedicate or even promote specialized career paths, even for the technical issues that have almost become the defining feature of multilateral relations. Diplomats who arrive to New York are usually overwhelmed with the tasks they are required to perform, and the knowledge they are expected to accumulate. The more their portfolio is technical, the more challenging this initiation phase of their work becomes.

Participating in these NAM working groups becomes almost a refuge for these 'multilaterally freshmen' diplomats. Reading the background documentation that residues at the archives of the coordinator is surely a rich resource, but not the only one. An equally important avenue of sharing knowledge and transmitting accumulated expertise is through the discussions that are usually interactive given the smaller number of delegates attending and the working level representation compared to larger NAM plenary meetings, which are usually at ambassadorial level with wider representation of NAM's membership. These close discussions immediately reveal the shared views and progressively the fine lines of divergent ones. They usually take place within collegiate, if not even friendly, atmosphere. A spirit of solidarity emanates therefrom, which becomes one of the most important in defending the 'group's' view when negotiating with other parties. Given that many of these meetings take place at the seat of the coordinator's mission rather than at UN headquarters, the hospitality of the convener adds an important conducive atmosphere for developing common positions; one which cannot be overestimated for developing a transnational, even transregional, bond among delegates of the NAM.

Several of the tasks of these working groups are repetitive, making it more conformable for new delegates to integrate, yet admittedly sometimes turning a little monotonous for more experienced representatives. These recurrent drafting tasks also facilitate the elaboration of common

documents and positions, as they rely on previously agreed language inherited through generations of representatives, and easily 'borrowed' from one forum to the other, particularly from those documents adopted at the Summit, to other more technical and expert level platforms. This is not all without cost, as the price to pay is curtailing, to an extent, the creativity of new 'language' and ideas, and adjusting long standing positions to changing negotiating environments, especially those now emerging within the current challenging phase of multilateralism.

The relative ease with which these working groups are able to develop fluid common positions is that each such group is usually dedicated to a technical issue, expectedly less tainted by political divisions. I would recall here my personal engagement in New York in both the Working Group on Disarmament coordinated by Indonesia and the Working Group on Peacekeeping coordinated by Morocco. These are technical issues, which command much 'allegiance' from the concerned diplomats. Even those that are first introduced to the subject when joining their missions to the UN, they quickly develop or even construct a brand of expertise, once they become familiar with the seemingly technical terminology, let alone decipher the shared coded language of acronyms and abbreviations.

NAM's New York Spirit and the Visitors

This is surely a 'plus' for the working groups as they gather the experts from the missions, almost leading to an 'epistemic' community, accruing knowledge, promoting expertise and consolidating harmony among the participants. Yet is also one of the shortcomings of such format, as this dimension of commonality may not necessarily extend beyond the frontiers of this closely-knit society. Well, it could, and should, at least extrapolate to the realm of permanent representatives, even if not to the same extent. Even when it does so, and to varying degrees, it still remains within the circle of diplomatic representatives to the NAM. It does not often extend to the other circles of representatives of sectorial or line ministries. After all, there are hardly NAM forums that gather, regularly and institutionally, such 'real' technical experts. Most of the efforts that fall in this realm are either one time or at best sporadic. They do not elevate to the bond that results from the more institutional working groups, which not only benefit from the intensity and regularity of contact, but thrive on the established professional culture of diplomacy.

This shortcoming becomes more acute as the negotiating issues become more technical, necessitating participation from these line ministries, or as initiatives are launched to intentionally bypass this community of technical diplomatic expertise including through involving representatives from other professional cultures. 'Specialized diplomats' dedicated to the negotiation of technical issues at UN headquarters may thus lose part of their influence in the negotiations, or at least may not have the same access to the now more restricted meetings formats, geared mainly for to incoming officials who have joined from capital line ministries. The established networks of diplomatic negotiators represented by the working groups become thus less central to the negotiating processes, less able to engage or get the attention of the 'new delegates'.

There have been a number of initiatives by the NAM to quickly adapt to this. I recall one which I witnessed myself when the Working Group on Peacekeeping devoted one of its meetings to Chiefs of Staff of members of NAM, as they arrived in New York to participate in their first meeting ever on peacekeeping called for by the Secretary General of the United Nations. An added level of complexity is when the outcomes of such meetings do not follow the standard format of subjecting a draft to intensive negotiations from expert to senior officials negotiators. Rather, the outcome may be a document prepared by the convener, and open, almost on take it or leave basis, to accession for those countries who may want to sign. That leaves little room for genuinely amending the draft outcome, if it proves substantially different from the national or group position. The only hope then is that the convener has either undertaken informally consultations to ensure that the draft is shared with main players, or that the convener has kept it at a general level sufficiently for it to be non-objectionable. In either case, the 'traditional' dynamics of the NAM contribution and negotiation of the outcome no longer apply as they would normally in other more structured processes.

NAM Working Groups from Start to Conclusion of Negotiations

These NAM working groups are quite instrumental therefore in galvanizing the Movement's positions on technical issues that are on the agenda of the United Nations, particularly the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs. Their most effective contribution is in formulating initial positions, which are then pronounced as opening discourses or thematic statements. They also usually

translate into working papers that are then included as part of the official documentation of the negotiating body or conference. As the negotiations move forward, and middle positions are required, the group dynamics change including the role of the coordinator or Chairman of the Group.

That is usual in negotiations, yet more challenging for group positions. That is the reason for which working groups assign facilitators for sub themes, who report then to the group for developing the positions further to accommodate for the progress of the negotiations. At some advanced stages though, individual delegations may become more active to defending issues of high priority to their national interest. That does not mean acting in contradiction to the group, as usually such positions would have been included in the first place in the collective papers. It is just that the fervor in defending them, or the degree of flexibility in modifying them, rests, naturally, with those delegations that proposed them in the first, place, and in coordination with the rest of the group of course. That is why online coordination and impromptu meetings become more and more important in the advanced phases of negotiations.

NAM in the Digital Multistakeholder Age

NAM working groups have already developed a longstanding tradition of coordination among the group experts by email. That enhances agility, which is much needed for ongoing negotiations. Still, there is more space develop online platforms for such group coordination. For example, a mobile phone application facilitating access to the NAM's document in general, and in particular that of its working groups focused on specialized multilateral issues. Such an online archive of the Movement's public documents would be a great addition to the ability of the NAM to develop further its common positions, and enhance its working methods. This may reflect a particular need of the Movement, given its tradition of having the Presidency undertake the main tasks of the secretariat. With such continuously changing nests, it becomes even more important to have a unified cumulative archive, especially if electronically. I recall that a think tank attempted to do so for the NAM documents related to disarmament². One can easily think of a similar platform for all of the NAM 'literature', in addition to a more interactive platform facilitating 'search and rescue' for negotiators who may be badly in need for such assistance in time tight negotiations.

² <http://cns.miis.edu/nam/#&panel1-1>

By doing so the rich residual knowledge of diplomats developing the NAM positions over generations would be available not only the specialized circles, but to the wider public. It would be truly contributing to shaping the global discourse, through friendly interactive media. It would also allow for more engagement with academic, research and civil society. It would reinforce NAM's multistakeholder diplomacy dimension, a continuously expanding feature of today's multilateral relations. Naturally, it would further anchor a somewhat invisible, and indeed noninvasive, institutionalization to the NAM that may still conform with its concept of the role of its presidency, members and working methods.

After Thoughts

Multilateral forums are often criticized for what they do not, or sometimes one could argue cannot, do. Yet they are little appraised for what they succeed to do, often belittling the functioning mechanisms. This contribution attempts to focus on the working level NAM, that is undertaking its tasks as best as it could. It recognizes the areas where improvements can be made, yet it also identifies those working methods that are actually producing results. The aim is not to magnify and say that these are NAM's most important achievements, nor that they are sufficient for achieving the Movement's objectives and goals.

The objective of this brief paper highlighting lessons learned, promoting best practices and carrying takeaways that are useful for other levels of the NAM, or even other forums. The key to effectiveness for group work, including on the multilateral level, remains clear working dynamics, efficient management, cohesive 'professional' culture fortified by intensive interaction geared towards common goals that are set through a participatory and intellectually rigorous process of harmonization divergences and ensuring genuine collective ownership. I would argue that these concepts, that may appear complex in this wording, are in fact simple to apply. They are arguably best demonstrated at the collegiate level of delegates attending as experts on the subject matter. However, they can also be emulated at higher level, if the same approach is followed. In such an instant, the 'working level' NAM may make the whole forum 'working' best to achieve its ideals, which are most needed in today's world and in the current state of multilateralism.