

NON-ALIGNMENT: THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE WAR

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (February 2022), the Global South has increasingly embraced a form of "functional non-alignment," characterized by diplomatic abstention from sanctions, moral condemnation of aggression, and hedging between power blocs. This paper examines the complexities of this posture in light of:

- 1. Iran's military backing of Russia both diplomatic and through drone exports and the subsequent tensions arising from the Iran Israel war.*
- 2. NATO's deepening defense commitments post-2025 summit and its strategic recalibration.*
- 3. The repercussions these interlocking conflicts have for non-aligned countries navigating strategic autonomy amidst multi-polar great-power rivalry.*

Keywords: Functional Non-Alignment, Aggression, Hedging, NATO's, Interlocking Conflicts.

Introduction

The Russia–Ukraine conflict has disrupted conventional alliance frameworks. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, has killed many civilians, caused massive displacements of the population, and destroyed infrastructure to a significant extent. With the traditional NATO Russia divide evolving, countries across the Global South are reclaiming non-alignment now reframed as **strategic autonomy**. This paper explores how the Iran Israel war and NATO's evolving posture during the 2025 summit complicate non-aligned diplomacy and global security.

Meaning of non-alignment

After World War II, many nations became independent, but the world was divided into two blocs – the capitalist bloc and the communist bloc. In these tense circumstances, none of the newly independent countries wanted to support one bloc or ideology. That is why the policy of non-alignment—maintaining an appropriate distance from both blocs—is called the Non-Aligned Movement.

As of **June 2025**, the Non-Aligned Movement consists of **120 full member states, 18–20 observer countries & 10 observer organizations** (e.g., African Union, ASEAN, Commonwealth Secretariat, UN).

It includes **about two-thirds of UN member states**, spanning **all African nations**, most of Asia and Latin America, plus a couple of European countries. It represents over **55% of the world's population**, giving it significant diplomatic weight on global platforms

The first NAM summit was held in 1961 in Belgrade — it was a meaningful initiative by Third World countries like India, Egypt, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia to protect themselves from the Cold War power blocs. But today, the world is again becoming bipolar. It started with the Russia–Ukraine war, and is now visible in the Iran–Israel and Iran–Palestine conflicts.

India: the Non- Aligned Movement (NAM)

India has long embodied the principles of non-alignment, evolving from Nehru’s idealistic vision into a sophisticated policy of strategic autonomy and multilateral pragmatism. As one of the founding leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Nehru championed Panchsheel—mutual respect, non-aggression, non-interference, equality, and peaceful coexistence—as a foundation for India’s foreign policy, enabling it to maintain independence while engaging cooperatively with both Western and Soviet blocs. Under V. K. Krishna Menon, India played a formative role in toppling colonial legacies and fostering solidarity among newly independent nations at events like Bandung and Belgrade, amplifying its voice within the Global South.

India’s early non-alignment offered moral leadership in advocating for disarmament, decolonization, and a New International Economic Order (NIEO), leveraging NAM to support small states and influence UN debates. Yet India was never aloof—it carefully balanced ties, securing aid, technology, and diplomatic support from both superpowers while preserving autonomy. Critics later noted that alignment with the USSR during Indira Gandhi’s tenure exposed the limitations of non-alignment in a turbulent regional environment.

In the contemporary era, India’s non-alignment has matured into a policy of “multi-alignment.” It maintains deep partnerships with the U.S., participates in the Quad, yet continues close relations with Russia, especially in defense and energy spheres, including abstaining from condemning Russia at the UN. As President of the G20 in 2023, India not only secured consensus on contentious issues like Ukraine but also elevated the African Union to permanent membership, evidencing its role as a bridge between Global North and South.

Bolstering its Global South leadership, India launched initiatives such as Vaccine Maitri, the International Solar Alliance, and the Global Development Compact, championing equitable development and climate justice. It advocates for UN Security Council reforms and sustainable South-South cooperation, positioning itself as a credible voice of the developing world.

Today, India promotes non-alignment not as ideological abstention but as agile diplomacy: a principled yet practical strategy enabling it to navigate great-power competition, support Global South solidarity, and protect its strategic autonomy. In doing so, it remains a central architect of a multi-polar world.

There are Some Organizations that are Blamed for Partitioning the World

Organization	Members	Impact
NATO(a military alliance)	Sweden(2024), Finland (2023)	Membership of NATO is always creates conflicts. It is main cause of Russia- Ukraine war.
QUAD(ANinformal strategic forum)	U.S.A., Australia, Japan, India	China opposed the Quad and said it's like an Asian NATO.
UNSC (A part of the UN)	U.S.A., China, Russia, U.K., France	Critics claim the UNSC (United Nations Security Council) often shows bias —favoring certain countries or ignoring others—rather than acting impartially.

The Non- Aligned Movement’s Key Achievements

The Non- Aligned Movement (NAM), established in the early 1960s, emerged as a third path for newly independent nations amid Cold War pressures

Its achievements include:

- **Promotion of global peace & easing of bipolar tensions:** NAM played a vital role in reducing Cold War hostility, advocated for peaceful conflict resolution, and supported disarmament—contributing to the eventual end of bipolar geopolitical polarization.
- **Acceleration of decolonization:** The united NAM front supported liberation movements across Africa, Asia, and Latin America—including Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe—expediting their journey to independence.
- **Fight against racism and apartheid:** It vocally opposed racial injustice and imposed sanctions on apartheid South Africa, significantly aiding Nelson Mandela's African National Congress.
- **Strengthening the United Nations:** Leveraging its collective size, NAM influenced UN General Assembly decisions, backed UN peacekeeping, and pressed for institutional reforms.
- **Shaping a New International Economic Order (NIEO):** It spearheaded discussions on economic justice—promoting South-South cooperation, balanced trade, technology sharing, and challenging neo-colonial economic structures.
- **Media independence:** NAM established its own news networks to counter Western media dominance, ensuring fair representation of member nations.

Evolution of Non-Alignment Post–Ukraine

The non-aligned stance is now **functional rather than ideological**. Countries condemn Russian aggression yet largely refrain from sanctions. Historical context shapes this posture: shared colonial histories and previous support from the USSR influence South Asian and African reluctance to confront Russia.

Regional cases (India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia,) illustrate **strategic autonomy** aligning with multiple great powers to preserve economic and security interests.

Iran's Role & the Iran Israel War

- Iran has openly supported Russia through UN votes and drone shipments (e.g., Shahed-131/136), also operating IRGC-linked forces in Crimea.
- The 2025 Iran–Israel conflict revealed limits in Iran's anti-Western axis: Russia and China distanced themselves despite formal ties.
- Weaknesses in shared Soviet-era air defense systems further strain expectations of military cooperation and signal fractures within the “Axis of Upheaval”.

NATO's 2025 Summit and Strategic Push

- At the June 2025 NATO summit, members committed to raising defense spending toward 5% of GDP to counter evolving threats.
- NATO's renewed unity, including U.S.–Israel–NATO cooperation during the Iran–Israel flare-up, prompts non-aligned nations to reassess global defense alignments.
- Rising apprehension that the conflict might spill into NATO territory highlights growing uncertainty for neutral countries.

Challenges for Non-Aligned States

- **Balancing Sanctions and Diplomacy**—Most non-aligned states criticize Russia's invasion while avoiding sanction regimes—aiming to stay on both Western and Russian good terms.
- **Security Entanglements**—Iran's collaboration with Russia extends pressure to the Middle East. Iran–Israel tensions and potential U.S. involvement force non-aligned countries to carefully manage diplomatic signaling.
- **Economic Vulnerability**—Commodity price spikes from compounded regional conflicts exacerbate debt and inflation in the Global South, heightening the cost of strategic autonomy.
- **Fragile Alliances**—The unreliable nature of emerging anti-West coalitions highlighted by Russia's shaky support for Iran reduces appeal of bloc-based security pacts.

Policy Implications

- **For non-aligned nations:** embrace pragmatic partnerships, participate selectively in multilateral institutions (e.g., UN, SCO), and continue functional non-alignment.
- **For NATO and Western powers:** acknowledge non-aligned interests particularly economic vulnerabilities while offering flexible cooperation frameworks that respect autonomy.
- **For Russia, Iran, China:** Internal alliance weaknesses suggest these relationships may be more transactional than ideological.

The Non-Aligned Movement's Hopeful Future

As the global landscape becomes increasingly **multi-polar**, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) offers renewed relevance as a **unifying platform for the Global South**. Today, it represents 120 countries—nearly two-thirds of the UN—advocating for **developing nations' voices** in trade, climate, finance, and peace negotiations.

A centerpiece of its future role is fostering **South–South trade cooperation**. After the successful Kampala Summit in 2024, NAM leaders emphasized building a **rule-based, equitable global trading system**, paving the way for collective economic growth among member states.

With the Global South projected to account for 70% of global consumption by 2050, NAM could evolve into a powerful economic bloc.

NAM also remains critical in championing **multilateralism and institutional reform**. It continues to push for Security Council reform, transparent financial systems, and development policies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Moreover, as great-power tensions in places like **Ukraine** and the **Middle East** deepen, NAM's principle of **strategic autonomy** allows member states to maintain diplomatic leverage, ensuring they aren't coerced into binary alignments.

In essence, NAM's future lies in reshaping itself into a **dynamic coalition**—anchored in economic cooperation, global justice, and diplomatic independence—to advance a more equitable, inclusive world.

Conclusion

The Russia–Ukraine war has decisively shifted the geopolitical calculus of the Global South, transforming ideological alignment into pragmatic non-alignment: a conscious, strategic posture optimized to maximize national interests without siding with any dominant power bloc. This “non-alignment 2.0” reflects a departure from Cold War-era blocs and embraces a multi-polar reality in which states wield **strategic autonomy**, maintaining freedom to pivot between Western security frameworks and Eastern economic or military partnerships. The war in Ukraine crystallized this evolution, prompting countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to abstain from or calibrate responses to sanctions and condemnations—asserting sovereignty and resurrecting a diplomatic philosophy that refuses to reduce complex crises to binary choices.

Taken together, these dynamics define a **tri-polar, interdependent matrix**. On one axis, Western security assurances are offered through NATO, AUKUS, and bilateral agreements. On another, Eastern alternative alliances—whether through the “Axis of Upheaval” comprising Russia, China, and Iran, or institutions like BRICS and the SCO—extend economic, technological, and military options. And overlaying all of this are regional crises—Ukraine, Hamas–Israel, Iran tensions, instability in the Sahel—that act as both constraint and catalyst, forcing nimble responses from Global South actors.

In short, the Global South has reinvented non-alignment as a tri-polar, pragmatic, and purpose-driven strategy—anchored neither in ideology nor bloc loyalty, but in flexibility, resilience, and diplomatic agility. These countries no longer seek to band together under a single banner; instead, they operate within a complex matrix, balancing Western security, Eastern alternatives, and regional volatility. Their collective future no longer depends on choosing sides, but on **mastering a chessboard** where survival and influence require strategic foresight, economic insulation, and nimble diplomacy.

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