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The Non-Aligned Movement and its Role in Enhancing Afro-Asian Cooperation

حركة عدم الانحياز ودورها في تعزيز التعاون الأفرو-آسيوي

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Abstract: The Afro-Asian axis constituted a fundamental starting point during the 1960s and 1970s, serving as a platform for solidarity and joint action aimed at achieving liberation and non-alignment with either bloc during the ideologically driven Cold War. In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) stands out as a transcontinental organization that formed a primary framework for developing and strengthening ties between African and Asian nations during a difficult era in human history—a time when international relations were defined by alignment with one of the two conflicting camps. The Non-Aligned Movement emerged as a "Third Way" that maintained ideological independence, contributing to the development of Afro-Asian relations across various sectors. This article examines these relations by analyzing the movement's contributions to enhancing Afro-Asian cooperation.

Keywords: Non-Aligned Movement, Afro-Asian Cooperation, Cold War.

الملخص: يشكل المحور الافرو اسيوي منطلق أساسي في فترة الستينيات والسبعينيات كمنصة تضامن وعمل مشترك قصد الوصول لتحرر وعدم الانحياز لاحد المعسكرين وقت الحرب الباردة ات الأسس الأيديولوجية حيث تبرز في هذا الصدد حركة عدم الانحياز كمنظمة عابرة للقارات والدول والتي شكلت اطار أساسي في تطوير وربط اواصل الدول الافريقية مع الدول الاسيوية في مرحلة عصيبة من تاريخ البشرية أي كان عنوان العلاقات الدولية الاصطفاف لاحد المعسكرين المتصارعين حيث برز حركة عدم الانحياز كخيار ثالث لا ينتمي لاحد أيديولوجيا كمما ساهم في تطوير العلاقات بين افريقيا واسيا في عديد القطاعات والتي سندرسها في مقالنا وفق عديد اسهامات حركة عدم الانحياز في تعزيز التعاون الافرو اسيوي

الكلمات المفتاحية: حركة عدم الانحياز، التعاون الافرو اسيوي، الحرب الباردة

Introduction: Afro-Asian relations are as ancient as human existence itself. Together, the two continents represent the heart of the Old World, encompassing ancient land and sea corridors and trade routes. The historical interconnectedness between the peoples and tribes of both continents has created deeply intertwined social, cultural, political, and economic bonds.

In the modern era, both continents faced European colonialism—a partner in shaping the Old World's core—which further unified them in their resistance against colonial movements. Upon gaining independence, most nations in both continents found themselves confronting an assertive form of capitalism that had shifted from military control to economic dominance and the imposition of political will.

The division of the world into two blocs—the Socialist East and the Capitalist West—and the intense conflict between them, with Third World countries serving as the primary theater, prompted the nations of both continents to establish the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). This movement took upon itself the mission of de-escalating tensions between the two superpowers, shielding Africa and Asia from the repercussions of this conflict, fostering South-South cooperation, and unifying the political stances of the two continents against attempts at hegemony.

Problem Statement: Accordingly, we pose the following question: How did the Non-Aligned Movement contribute to enhancing Afro-Asian cooperation?

1- The Conditions Preceding the Establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement

Afro-Asian cooperation is not a product of the modern era; rather, it is the result of social, cultural, and economic interactions that have brought the two interconnected continents together since the dawn of human existence. The geographical sphere is unified, social structures are closely aligned, and the mixing of the populations of both continents was necessitated by nature, geography, and economic and livelihood needs. The Non-Aligned Movement was merely a political framework that united the two largest landmasses in the world, which represent the heart of the Old World.

The twentieth century witnessed the growing signs of a renaissance among African and Asian nations, the majority of which were under the yoke of colonialism. This gave rise to the necessity of their solidarity, which was embodied in the holding of a series of conferences at the continental level. The agendas of these meetings included

the denunciation of colonialism and, most importantly, the demand for the right to self-determination for colonized nations, ultimately culminating in the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement[1]In the same context, Africa and Asia witnessed a group of conferences that served as a prelude to the founding of the movement, which we will address as follows:

1-1. Pan-African Conferences (Panafricanisme)

Pan-Africanism: This is a movement fundamentally based on achieving African unity and independence through reliance on African culture. Emerging at the end of the 19th century, it centered on the values of resisting the oppression and exploitation faced by Black Africans globally. The Pan-African movement relied on an ethical dimension, calling for an end to the economic and social injustice and coercion directed at Black Africans. Initially, it did not focus on political demands as much as it emphasized societal and cultural requirements, the core of which was the struggle against racism [1]. The Pan-African movement witnessed numerous conferences that contributed to establishing an African consciousness and perspective in the face of colonialism, most notably the First Pan-African Conference in 1900, the Second in 1919, up to the Sixth Pan-African Congress in 1945.

1-2. Asian People's Conferences

Asian peoples were likewise subjected to numerous colonial campaigns. In response, alongside armed resistance to combat colonialism, there was significant political activity through the convening of meetings to express the aspirations and sufferings of Asian nations. These gatherings focused on ambitions that all converged toward independence from Western colonialism. This was manifested in several Asian conferences held as a prelude to the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement, including the Bierville Conference (1926), the Nagasaki Conference (1926), the Brussels Conference (1926), the First New Delhi Conference (1947), the Second New Delhi Conference (1949), the Baguio Conference (1950), and the Bogor Conference (1954)[2]

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[1] **Al-Jamal, Shawqi. (1964).** ***Afro-Asian Solidarity and its Impact on Arab Issues*****. Cairo, Egypt: Egyptian House for Authorship and Translation, p. 15.**

[2] **Grine, Abdelkrim. (2009-2010).** ***The Organization of African Unity and its Role in Solving Continental Problems: The Biafra Crisis and the Somali-Kenyan Conflict as a Model*****. Master's Thesis in Contemporary African History, University of Ben Youcef Ben Khedda, p. 13.**

1-3. The Bandung Conference (1955)

The Bandung Conference is considered the foundational assembly of the Non-Aligned Movement. It was held between April 18 and 24, 1955, in Indonesia, bringing together 29 Asian and African countries, in addition to four observer states. All participating nations shared a common history of suffering—or continued struggle—under the repercussions of colonialism, whether through the occupation of their lands or as a barrier hindering their development and renaissance. The "Colombo Powers" group, which called for and organized this conference, focused on several key objectives, including:

- **Promoting Cooperation:** Encouraging and fostering mutual cooperation among Asian and African peoples.
- **Socio-Economic & Cultural Analysis:** Studying and monitoring the economic and cultural challenges facing Asian and African nations.
- **Anti-Colonial Struggle:** Focusing on the specific problems and aspirations of Asian and African peoples in their fight against colonialism and its lingering effects.
- **Global Peace & Security:** Examining the contributions that Asian and African countries could offer toward maintaining international peace and enhancing global cooperation

2. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

2-1. Definition of Non-Alignment

- **Linguistic Definition:** It refers to the act of not joining one party against another in a particular cause, issue, or incident, and avoiding taking a side in a manner that suggests a lack of neutrality in judgment or perception.
- **Idiomatic/Technical Definition:** "A policy whose early signs emerged during the Afro-Asian Friendship Conference in Bandung in 1955 and was fully crystallized at the Belgrade Conference—the founding summit of the Non-Aligned Movement—in 1961."

In the context of defining the movement, several of its founding pillars provided definitions as follows:

- **Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser:** "...It is the refusal to lean toward either of the two blocs; as such, it is not a negative policy that seeks to distance itself from world problems..."

- **Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru:** "...The policy of non-alignment is the search for security and peace, and working toward the realization of that goal..."

Yugoslav President Marshal Josip Broz Tito: "...The policy of non-alignment emerged as a result of the need for many newly independent states to resist the currents calling for the division of the world into spheres of influence during the Cold War. "...on one hand, and the necessity to preserve and strengthen the independence of these nations while working to provide the essential conditions for economic and social development on the other..."

- **Former Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah:** "...The policy of non-alignment translates as a refusal to align with any bloc..."

- **Former Indonesian President Sukarno:** "...The policy of non-alignment means the strengthening of peaceful coexistence..." [3]

2-2. Circumstances Surrounding the Emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement

There were numerous conditions and reasons that led to the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement, ranging from the prevailing international situation and the urgent need for Afro-Asian solidarity to the pressing necessity of addressing challenges collectively. Below, we discuss the primary factors that led to the founding of the movement:

- **Positive Interaction in Afro-Asian Conferences:** The constructive engagement in the conferences of African and Asian peoples regarding shared issues—most notably colonialism, development, racism, and cultural dimensions—served as a starting point for aligning perspectives and introducing the cultural heritage of the participating nations.

- **Bipolarity (The Division of the World):** The world was divided into two camps: the Socialist East and the Capitalist West. The core idea of non-alignment was to avoid siding with either bloc, ensuring that African and Asian

[3] **Abbas, Mohamed. (2007).** ***Victory Without a Price: The Algerian Revolution*****. Casbah Publishing House, Algeria, p. 297.**

countries remained sovereign decision-makers rather than subordinates, transcending the existing ideological friction.

- **National Liberation Movements:** The 1950s witnessed waves of liberation from colonialism, accompanied by sacrifices and struggles that required support. The Non-Aligned Movement served as a platform and framework to provide assistance to colonized nations, both materially and politically, by presenting their causes to international public opinion as legitimate rights to self-determination.

- **Avoidance of Ideological Conflicts:** There were continuous attempts to embroil African and Asian nations in ideological conflicts at a time when they desperately needed to build their economic and service infrastructures. Since most were newly independent or still struggling for independence, this created a common ground for establishing a political entity far removed from the tensions and polarizations between the Eastern and Western blocs.

- **The Diligent Pursuit of Solidarity:** The urgent need for collective action to confront the various political, strategic, and economic challenges imposed at the time on African and Asian nations. This necessity created a solid ground for cooperation and rapprochement between them.

- **The Belgrade Conference (1961):** This conference officially announced the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement as a direct result of the aforementioned factors[4]. [1]

2-3. Principles of the Non-Aligned Movement

- **Peaceful Coexistence:** Emphasizing the principle of peaceful coexistence through the pursuit of an independent policy, the core of which is avoiding alignment with either of the two major blocs.

- **Support for Liberation Movements:** Providing unwavering support for national liberation movements across the globe.

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[4] **Litim, Issa. (2005-2006).** ***The Afro-Asian Bloc and Liberation Issues: The Algerian Cause as a Model*****. Master's Thesis in Modern and Contemporary History, University of Hadj Lakhdar - Batna, p. 20.**

- **Non-Alignment with Military Alliances:** Refraining from joining any military alliances formed within the context of the ideological conflict arising from the Cold War.

- **Rejection of Foreign Military Bases:** Prohibiting the establishment of foreign military bases on the national territories of member states[5]

- **3- The Role of the Non-Aligned Movement in Enhancing Afro-Asian Cooperation**

- Following World War II, the world experienced a severe structural fracture that divided it into two blocs adopting diametrically opposed ideologies. Each bloc sought to amass the largest number of allies and expand its influence, even through the use of force, leading to an arms race unprecedented in human history. This situation resulted in dangerous confrontations along the lines of contact that nearly triggered nuclear catastrophes, most notably the Cuban Missile Crisis.

- On the sidelines of this perilous situation, many nations stood by, watching as the world faced potential annihilation at the press of a button. These countries were subjected to constant attempts at recruitment into one of the two camps, or blackmail under the threat of force. In this context, it became imperative for these nations to unite to make their voices heard and to liberate themselves from the attempts at control and hegemony imposed by the conflicting parties.

- To ensure that this new bloc did not take on the character of conflict or confrontation, it adopted a middle ground between the two camps to de-escalate tensions and seek all possible peaceful solutions. Furthermore, for this new grouping to exert significant influence, it had to possess various elements of power, which could only be achieved through mutual cooperation across various fields, particularly in the political and economic spheres[6]

3-1. Political Cooperation

Political relations between Asian and African nations are as ancient as human existence on Earth. Geography and social integration have made communication and interaction between them a necessity rather than a choice. With the establishment of

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[5] **Abdul Khaleq Abdulla, The Contemporary World and International Conflicts, Alam al-Ma'rifah, Kuwait, 1978, p. 158.**
[6] **Ali Sobh, Regional Conflicts in Half a Century 1945-1995, Dar Al-Manhal Al-Lubnani for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, 2006, p. 68.**

the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), this cooperation became more framed, organized, and influential on the international stage in general, and within the Afro-Asian sphere in particular.

The **Bandung Conference**, held in Indonesia in 1955, is considered the cornerstone of the cooperation process between the two continents. According to the conference proceedings, political cooperation is based on the following:

- **Support for Human Rights and Self-Determination:** Upholding the fundamental rights of individuals and the right of nations to determine their own destiny.
- **Condemnation of Racial Discrimination:** Denouncing all forms of racism and apartheid.
- **Combatting Colonialism:** Opposing colonial rule and supporting peoples struggling for their freedom.
- **Supporting Regional Causes:** Advocating for the issues of the Arab Maghreb, Palestine, Aden, the Arab Protectorates, and West Irian.
- **Advocating for UN Membership:** Supporting applications for admission to the United Nations, particularly those of Cambodia, Ceylon, Japan, Jordan, Libya, Nepal, and unified Vietnam.
- **Reforming International Representation:** Ensuring adequate representation of Asian and African countries within the UN Security Council.
- **Disarmament:** Calling for the prohibition of atomic weapons, the limitation of armaments, and the imposition of international oversight.
- **Peaceful Conflict Resolution:** Settling all international disputes through peaceful means. [1]

These principles serve as the movement's political charter and a commitment by all parties to unify their efforts in assisting nations still under the yoke of colonialism. The movement aimed to help these nations secure seats in international organizations and achieve fair representation for both continents in the Security Council.

The Afro-Asian group succeeded in realizing much of this charter; through cooperation, most countries in both continents gained their independence and became

full members of the United Nations. Furthermore, the People's Republic of China secured its place as a permanent member of the Security Council, and many of these points have since been integrated into the core principles of the United Nations itself. The collective action of the movement's member states, moving as a unified bloc on various issues of concern to both continents, has yielded significant results. Continuous coordination through meetings and conferences has brought the two continents closer, transforming them into a formidable force...capable of defending their rights, standing as a bulwark against the deterioration of global security, and mitigating tensions between the two rival blocs.

Among the most significant institutions and bodies that emerged as a result of the Non-Aligned Movement are:

- **The Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO):** Established to strengthen cultural and political ties.
- **The New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP):** Launched in 2005 to bolster economic and developmental cooperation.

Furthermore, the movement began operating in coordination with the **League of Arab States**, as an organization functioning under the United Nations umbrella, comprising Arab nations from both Asia and Africa.

Under the charter of the Non-Aligned Movement, member states granted the movement the mandate to act on issues concerning Afro-Asian peoples. It became their representative voice and a supporter of all nations. Permanent Afro-Asian delegations at the United Nations adopted the **Bandung Conference Communiqué** as an official guiding document, acting upon its principles without the constant need to consult their respective governments regarding its clear resolutions. They strive with solidarity to ensure its full implementation and benefit, remaining prepared to advocate for resolutions concerning Arab causes within the UN.[7]

Political cooperation between the two continents is not limited to collective action within the framework of the movement but extends to **bilateral cooperation**, which flourished through the proximity fostered by NAM. A prime example is **Algerian-Chinese cooperation**, evident in both political and economic spheres. Algerian-Chinese relations are deeply rooted, dating back to the Algerian War of Independence

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[7] **Hassouna, Mohamed Abdel Khalek, The First Asian-African Conference Held in Bandung, Indonesia (April 18-24, 1955), (Egypt, Publisher: Matabe' Jaridat Al-Sabah, 1955), p. 230.**

when China supported Algeria. Visits by revolutionary leaders began before independence and continue to this day; for instance, a delegation from the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) visited China on May 20, 1960. During this visit, both parties reached identical viewpoints regarding the liberation movements sweeping Africa, Asia, and Latin America since the Bandung Conference, noting that the solidarity movement among Asian and African peoples in their struggle against colonialism had achieved monumental progress. [3]

While the movement gained significant momentum in its early years due to the charismatic leadership of figures like **Gamal Abdel Nasser**, **Jawaharlal Nehru**, and **Ahmed Sukarno**—personalities who transformed the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) into a major political force—this momentum has waned in recent years. Following the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, the world shifted toward a unipolar system led by the **United States**, thereby removing one of the primary catalysts for the movement's emergence. Furthermore, most of NAM's core principles were adopted by the international community and its various organizations as their own.

The American dominance over much of the world, including countries that were once pillars of the movement, has led to a loss of its foundational strength and influence. Additionally, a lack of coordination among its members has weakened the movement, leading it to abandon many of the principles and roles for which it was originally established. Among the manifestations of NAM's recent decline are:

- **Inaction regarding member states:** The movement failed to act effectively concerning issues affecting its own members subjected to invasion or siege, such as the cases of **Afghanistan** and **Iraq**, the decades-long blockade and subsequent conflict involving **Iran**, the intervention in and subsequent destabilization of **Libya**, as well as the crises in **Syria** and **Yemen**[8]

3-2. Economic Cooperation

The African and Asian continents are the largest in terms of landmass and represent a massive human demographic. Africa is exceptionally rich in raw materials and energy resources, possessing vast agricultural potential capable of providing food security for its densely populated neighbor. Conversely, Asia possesses advanced technology that

[8] **Brahimi Aicha, Aspects of Chinese-Algerian Consensus in Supporting Liberation Movements and China's Support for the Algerian Cause through El-Moudjahid Newspaper, Al-Masadir Journal, Vol. 19, No. 1, July 2024, p. 127.**

can assist Africa in industrial and agricultural sectors. From this perspective, and within the framework of rapprochement and traditional cooperation established through bilateral and multilateral agreements—and aligned with the outputs and goals of the Non-Aligned Movement—the two continents have strived to become a cohesive political and economic power capable of preserving their interests in a world fraught with conflict and polarization.

3-2-1. Main Pillars of Economic Cooperation

A. Connectivity and Infrastructure Initiatives:

- **The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):** A Chinese initiative launched to revive the ancient Silk Road that linked China to Europe and Africa. Known as "One Belt, One Road," it consists of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road." The initiative aims to develop historical trade routes by constructing natural gas and oil pipelines, building extensive road and rail networks, and expanding electrical power and internet infrastructure...The New Silk Road consists of a land route, a maritime route, a digital silk road, and oil and natural gas pipelines. [1]

Through this massive project, China aimed to revive the ancient Silk Road that once linked the three continents of the Old World and served as the artery of global trade. Given current technological advancements, population growth, and production abundance, China sought to reconnect the world via land, sea, and air routes, alongside modern communication lines, to boost the economy and achieve significant financial returns. This project is considered a promising venture, provided it is fully implemented, despite challenges—primarily American competition, which views the project with apprehension as it threatens the revenues and market dominance the U.S. has traditionally enjoyed. However, for Africa and Asia, it represents a transformative project that could help both continents transcend the cycle of chronic underdevelopment.[9]

- **The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC):** This is an Indian-Japanese initiative focusing on sustainable development, health, and maritime connectivity as an alternative that emphasizes quality infrastructure and human capacity building. The idea of the AAGC emerged in a joint declaration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in November

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[9] **The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative: The Global Economic Project of the Century, Arab Democratic Center for Strategic, Political and Economic Studies, Berlin, Germany, 1st Edition, 2019, p. 12.**

2016. The corridor aims to establish a human-centric sustainable growth strategy, with details developed through a broad consultative process involving various stakeholders across Asia and Africa.

The corridor is built upon four fundamental pillars:

1. Development and cooperation projects.
2. High-quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity.
3. Enhancing capacities and skills.
4. People-to-People Partnership[10].

B. Energy and Mining Cooperation Asian industries rely fundamentally on raw materials sourced from Africa. In addition to oil and gas, Asian manufacturing utilizes various minerals such as cobalt and lithium, which are essential for the production of batteries and electric vehicles. In return, Asian countries contribute to developing oil and gas fields in Africa and transferring manufacturing technology and renewable energy expertise to the African continent.

The African Development Bank's 2020 outlook report, for instance, indicated that African economies are experiencing steady growth; it was projected to rise from 3.4% in 2019 to 3.9% in 2020, reaching approximately 4.1% in 2021. Africa also recorded a decrease in its trade deficit, which stood at only about $28 billion in 2018, with the volume of exports rising to $413.8 billion in 2017 compared to $355.4 billion in 2016. [11]

C. Agricultural Sector and Food Security The African continent represents a potential "food basket" for the densely populated Asian continent, given its fertile lands, abundant water resources, and qualified labor force. Conversely, Asian countries invest in Africa to develop its agriculture by introducing various modern means, techniques, and technologies that help increase production, abundance, and

[10] Asia Africa Growth Corridor Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development: A Vision Document, African Development Bank Meeting,Ahmedabad,India 22-26 May 2017,p 1

[11] **Mohamed Khellaf, Tawil Nassima, The Belt and Road Initiative in Africa: Challenges and Stakes, Al-Mufakkir Journal, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2022, p. 125.**

quality. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is considered one of the most prominent investors in the African agricultural sector.

In this context, Al-Qahtani pointed out that the Kingdom will serve as a logistical gateway for the most important African countries in the world, noting that the current period is ideal for investment in the agricultural field—especially in strategic commodities such as cocoa and coffee—which contributes to enhancing exports and global trade movement, while linking the East and West. He further noted that the Kingdom possesses extensive research expertise in the field of agriculture and food, expecting that it will utilize its agricultural research centers to explore new crops that assist African nations

...and the region, as the Kingdom prioritizes regional and global strategic partnerships that align with the objectives of "Vision 2030." [12]

Conclusion

Joint Afro-Asian action would not have gained such momentum had it not been for the primary organizing framework provided by the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**. This movement carried the burdens and aspirations of millions across the two continents, who had endured decades under the yoke of colonialism, poverty, and illiteracy. The movement empowered many vulnerable nations within the group, enabling them to demand their independence and revolt against occupiers. Furthermore, it allowed these nations to embark on their developmental journeys through provided aid and the opening of markets.

Political and economic cooperation between Africa and Asia would not have reached this level of strength and vitality without being under the umbrella of the Non-Aligned Movement, which provided cover, protection, and support. However, the subsequent fragmentation and division weakened the movement, marginalizing its influence on the global stage and hindering its role in fostering cooperation between the two continents.

Given the current conditions facing most African and Asian nations, the **revival of the Non-Aligned Movement** has become an utmost necessity, especially in light of a unipolar world order that has sidelined international law. This has allowed Western

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[12] **Ayat Nour, Riyadh Explores Agricultural Investment Opportunities in the African Continent, Asharq Al-Awsat, available at: https://aawsat.com/الاقتصاد/5012136-الرياض-تستكشف-فرص-الاستثمار-الزراعي-في-القارة-الأفريقية , accessed on: 08/03/2026.**

powers to resume their imperialist policies under what is known as **Neo-colonialism**, which has stripped many countries of their economic and political independence.

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