



THE FUTURE OF DIPLOMACY PROJECT

# Diplomacy and Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Navigating the Non-Aligned Movement

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Moves to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation measures have been opposed by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as unfair, unnecessary, or disproportionately burdening developing countries.** However, such normative arguments do not necessarily determine individual NAM states' behaviors and actions.
- **Recognizing that an individual NAM member's actions are not strongly correlated with NAM positions expands the scope of diplomatic engagement on nuclear non-proliferation issues.** The right mixture of incentives and promotion of mutual interests can narrow the gap on nuclear cooperation.
- **There are limits to NAM intransigence.** Holding onto principled and intractable negotiating positions may prove tempting for key NAM players as a means of drawing attention to themselves or enhancing bargaining leverage in a pending negotiation. But intransigence carries a price. An Iranian NAM Chairmanship from 2012 to 2015 could encourage fragmentation with NAM, or more frequent abstentions from extreme NAM positions.
- **The path taken by key developing countries that choose to support the nuclear non-proliferation regime will play a role in shaping the future nuclear order.** Creatively narrowing the divide among key stakeholders of the developed and developing world to construct new shared understandings will help determine the scope and nature of the spread of nuclear energy use.

By Yvonne Yew

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## ENTERING A NEW ERA

The Obama Administration has sought a global cooperative approach to stem the spread of nuclear weapons. This push for a stronger global engagement on the non-proliferation front has also been paralleled by an American commitment to promoting nuclear arms control. The administration has increased its

voluntary funding for nuclear technical assistance to developing countries, supported the access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and has set out a longer-term vision of a world without nuclear weapons. In committing support as well as investing capital in all three pillars - nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and nuclear energy promotion - the United States has created an opening for reinvigorating multilateral cooperation in all of these areas.

Such a shift in direction has affected the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that was established exactly 50 years ago in 1961 in Belgrade. Influenced by its co-

lonial legacy, the NAM which sees itself as representing “the global South,” has long viewed international developments through the prism of North-South politics and still largely defines its modus operandi along these lines. At the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which serves as a guardian to ensure nuclear power is not misused for military purposes, differences between the NAM and the Western world frame the nuclear non-proliferation discourse. While there is little dispute that countries would like to live in a safer and more secure world, differences of views and priorities alongside individual geopolitical motivations to resist stronger non-proliferation efforts have shaped non-proliferation discussions.

## UNDERSTANDING THE NAM

While some leading NAM countries have sought to run the nuclear debate as a confrontation between developed and developing nations, the reality is much more complicated. Key actors within the Movement colored generalizations about the 120-strong membership of NAM. These generalizations overlook the group’s heterogeneity of interests. For many NAM governments that do not view the defense of nuclear rights and non-proliferation efforts in zero-sum terms, the Movement’s polarized positions have failed to reflect more nuanced opinions.

Part of the confusion in making sense of NAM positions arises from the fact that analysts have often failed to appreciate the NAM’s multifaceted role. The co-existence of the NAM as at once a normative concept, promoting a more equitable global order; a guardian of shared norms and principles; an association representing caucused positions in multilateral discussions; and as a foreign policy tool has resulted in much of the Movement’s seemingly schizophrenic behavior. The ‘NAM as a normative concept’ would explain why there is a broad subscription to NAM principles and positions. At the same time, an understanding of the ‘NAM as an association’ allows NAM members to remain under its umbrella and acquiesce to joint statements even if these do not mirror national positions. It also allows certain members to undertake similar actions with regards non-proliferation steps with fellow NAM members. In its definition as a foreign policy tool, NAM countries have been able to

sign on to stronger non-proliferation measures based on their security, political and economic calculations, despite a divergence of views from NAM-stated positions.

## INSIGHTS FOR POLICYMAKERS

*NAM Principles in Perspective.* Much of the NAM’s positions towards strengthening nuclear non-proliferation efforts have been shaped and influenced by the normative discourse over the fairness of placing additional obligations upon developing countries and of eroding nuclear rights. However, such normative arguments are prescriptive and not descriptive. Nor do these positions reflect the entirety of other considerations involved. Thus, they do not necessarily determine NAM states’ behaviors and actions. On the other hand, with more developing countries seeking or expanding their nuclear power, the jury is still out as to how much the developing world’s narrative could shape the future of the global nuclear order. What sort of operational parameters will impact upon the United States’ nuclear vision? Along the way, NAM states are likely to try to maximize the commitments they receive from major powers with minimal compromises made that could curtail their own nuclear rights. This should not, however, be confused with an arbitrary rejection of stronger non-proliferation efforts by NAM members.

*Rhetoric vs. Reality.* NAM leaders have traditionally professed an affinity to the Movement by retaining an independent and ambivalent position toward the developed world. This tactic has also served many NAM states well with respect to their domestic constituencies, as is the case for many countries in the Arab world. Yet, other NAM states are careful to avoid a position that could be seen as antagonistic toward one side or the other. At the same time, countries that have embraced the ‘NAM as a concept’-vision, might serve as a restraining power on those that might want to manipulate the Movement for their own geopolitical ends. Thus, the NAM’s often changing role and its symbolism in the developing world must be fully understood.

*Evolving the Nuclear Narrative.* Given the differences and normative drivers behind both the NAM and

Western states' approach to nuclear non-proliferation, political compromises will likely be difficult. Calling upon influential pragmatic developing countries to demonstrate leadership within the NAM can be problematic, though might not be impossible. While NAM 'spoilers' such as Cuba and Iran have hijacked the NAM platform to pursue an anti-American agenda, NAM members who have an interest in establishing their credentials as reasonable international actors have distanced themselves from identifying with the 'spoilers.' Attempts to change the Movement's direction to seek more moderate positions could be a way forward. But few have cared to do so and the resulting apathy is evident in the lack of appetite to transform an organization that lacks legitimacy, leverage, and homogeneity.

*Promoting Voluntary Adherence.* Addressing the NAM narrative can also be useful. In the short term, implementing the Additional Protocol and efforts to multilateralize the nuclear fuel cycle have shown that adopting such measures are much easier when not presented as binding commitments. The downside of accepting voluntary enforcement is evident: it increases the likelihood of proliferation through the back door. These remain serious obstacles that have not proven to be immediately resolvable. Over the longer term, investing in the development of alternative options for NAM states – such as promoting regional nuclear frameworks to build confidence, and developing proliferation-resistant technologies for the next generation of nuclear reactors – could be a more effective manner of addressing proliferation concerns.

*Complementing Competing Priorities.* Other developed countries should join the United States in addressing the priorities of the NAM by promoting technical cooperation crucial to developing countries. This will help delegitimize NAM views that divide nuclear interests along North-South lines. The United States has provided the largest amount of additional financial contribution to the IAEA's technical cooperation program. Previously, such contributions may not have been given their due merit within the NAM. This has only hurt the same developing countries that fail to support efforts that promote peaceful nuclear

assistance alongside stronger nuclear non-proliferation measures.

*Implications of an Iranian NAM Chairmanship.* Iran is scheduled to take over the NAM Chairmanship from 2012 to 2015. NAM members that do not want to feel reined in by Iran can be expected to exercise greater vigilance, thereby encouraging further break-away or abstentions from more extreme positions. Iran can also be expected to stymie discussions on stronger safeguards measures and further politicize NAM positions. But it is unclear if this will impact on-going NAM states' cooperation on non-proliferation efforts. A different scenario might be true for states in the Middle East. Faced with strategic and national security uncertainties and a possible future nuclear-armed Iran, some countries in the Middle East may be tempted to seek their own (latent) nuclear weapons capabilities, based on national security and related concerns. Under such circumstances, they, like Iran, would have an equal interest in advocating in favor of a minimalist-type nuclear verifications system. A multi-nuclear Middle East will present an alarming scenario and of the ultimate collapse of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

*Diplomacy and Outreach.* Recognizing that NAM members' actions are not strongly correlated with official NAM positions expands the scope of diplomatic engagement. If NAM members' decisions can be understood as the result of a cost-benefit analysis, the right mixture of incentives and promotion of mutual interests can increase the likelihood of nuclear cooperation. Diplomacy and consultation can help sharpen how much of the differences are substantive, as opposed to those that can be overcome between the NAM and its interlocutors. A robust engagement to creatively narrow the divide among key stakeholders from the developed and developing world will help shape new shared understanding to better monitor the spread of nuclear energy use.

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The Future of Diplomacy Project is dedicated to promoting the study and understanding of diplomacy, negotiation and statecraft in international politics today. The Project aims to build Harvard Kennedy School's ability to teach in this area, to support research in modern diplomatic practice and to build public understanding of diplomacy's indispensable role in an increasingly complex and globalized world.

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