CHAPTER VII

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Non-alignment, as a policy, is broadly understood as a strategic foreign policy option adopted by several ruling elites of different countries keeping in view the economic, political and military situation in the domestic front, as well as the regional and global environment. Egypt was among the first few Arab states to formulate and pursue this policy. Its affiliation to non-alignment was not a mere coincidence nor was it merely a timely political decision, but a practical expression of an age-old cultural patrimony, a distinct geographical position and search for a dynamic international role. The depth of the belief in this policy was even illustrated by its international stand, following World War II, when it abstained, on 30 June, 1950 from voting in favour of the US request namely, that the UN should interfere militarily to protect South Korea.¹ This is but one example of the several stands which Egypt took, reflecting a non-aligned policy that had yet to be fully expressed, in clearly defined concepts.

Though Egypt had a framework of a non-aligned policy before President Nasser came to power and the policy continued to be pursued with some vigour both during the presidentship of Anwar el-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian policy of non-alignment had reached a high water-mark only during the days of President Nasser. In fact, Nasser was the first Egyptian to link Egypt’s international policy with non-alignment. His first reference to Egypt’s commitment

to this policy was on 29 July 1954, when he decided that the second goal after evacuation of British troops from Egypt was the non-adherence to any pact or joint defence. Nasser was the remarkable personality of Egypt who lifted the policy from the narrow confines of anti-imperialism vis-a-vis Britain and gave it a Third World focus.

Nasser along with other leaders, was also instrumental in laying the foundation of the non-aligned movement (NAM) which emphasized non-alignment as an important aspect of foreign policy. His attempt to pursue this policy and his role in the NAM made him a charismatic leader throughout the Third World. Even the Western statesmen have admitted that Nasser's non-alignment policy did have a merit. Thus, no one can ignore the brilliant contribution of Nasser to Egyptian policy of non-alignment.

Nasser was a remarkable man with strikingly intuitive approach towards politics. He was a man with whom the Egyptian people identified national self-respect and Arab adulation.

Since the Revolution of 1952, he had faced repeated crises and even thrived on them. Despite disasters, he had always bounced back. His emergence as a charismatic leader began in 1955 with the activation of his anti-imperialist policies. The major catalyst in the emergence of his charismatic leadership was perhaps the overwhelming enthusiasm with which his anti-Western policies were greeted inside Egypt and within the Arab world. His defiance of the

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2 ibid, p.6.
West in a series of dramatic and rightly publicized acts coincided with the prevailing political orientations of the Arabs.

Egypt's prestige was enhanced by two important incidents that marked Nasser's foreign policy in 1955. The first was Nasser's active role in the Bandung Conference which witnessed fierce political battles and, had it not been for the efforts of Nasser along with Nehru and Chou-En-Lai, it would have been doomed to failure. Thus, Nasser's participation in the conference was an indication that Egypt could play a positive role in world affairs and it could also set an example for fellow Third World countries. The second was the conclusion of the Czech-arms deal which was a valuable symbol of the break with the former allies firmly labelled as imperialists and who had pursued a policy of divide-and-rule towards the Arab world. It was the course of Nasser's foreign policy which could be presented as positive and one which projected him as defending an Egypt under siege. Moreover, Nasser's definite ideology of pan-Arabism reinforced the feeling at home that Egypt's historical moments had arrived.

The Nasser-led concept of pan-Arabism and Arab non-alignment led to the proposition that Arab unity was inseparable from socialism. Socialism was a doctrine which gradually gathered strength and was represented as being irresistible and inevitable, and in which Arabs, with the Egyptians in the forefront, could take deep pride. Egyptian policy of socialism had evolved over a decade along with Egyptian policy of pan-Arabism and non-alignment in the context of domestic and foreign policy compulsions. Gradually isolated by the West, Nasser had no option but to depend upon the Communist bloc states. Also a restructuring of the Egyptian domestic economy for an accelerated and planned
development led him to opt for socialism and a dominant role for state sector. Thus, single-party system, pan-Arabism and non-alignment were not only interlinked but also represented a significant phase of Egyptian domestic and foreign policy, especially under Nasser.

Nasser, largely through his regional foreign policy, especially pan-Arabism, was able to acquire a popular following. His words stirred the souls not only of Egyptians but of the Arabs in general, and helped to stimulate the fulfilment of the popular wish that this was how Egypt stood and should be accepted in the international community. Even Secretary Dulles of the United States, later in 1958, argued that "Nasser, like Hitler, could excite emotions and enthusiasm". In a White House meeting, Eisenhower also admitted that "Arab sympathies toward Nasser were probably greater than we thought existed." Even Mustafa Amin, the Egyptian journalist, who was imprisoned and tortured under Nasser, said, "Nasser has done a lot harm to me, my friends and my country but I must admit that he has made me proud to be an Egyptian." This was a telling tribute from a person like Mustafa Amin who was prepared to give Nasser the benefit of doubt because of the pride he had instilled among the Egyptians.

Nasser embarked on an ambitious course designed to set Egypt in the vanguard of Middle Eastern and African affairs. He had elaborated it in his book *Philosophy of the Revolution* in which he had mentioned three circles - Arab,

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African and Islamic. It is of significance that Nasser had made no mention about the policy of non-alignment in his book *The Philosophy of Revolution* though that policy had developed roots by that time. It is important to note that in due course of time Nasser ignored the third circle, Islamic, as described in his book and innovated the circle of NAM.  

As noted earlier, the year 1955 marked the period of transition in Egyptian foreign policy. Significantly it coincided with Nasser’s rise as a charismatic leader both in Egypt and in the region. By the end of 1955, Nasser had already visualized the basic ideas of a policy by means of which small nations could join together for mutual protection and speak with a common voice in world affairs. 

Besides, Nasser put great emphasis on the real independence of a country. The principal nationalist aim, he insisted, was independence and the only way to achieve and maintain it was by breaking ties with the great powers and by binding the Arab states together into a solid bloc. Through a set of bold steps like full support to the Palestinians, the Czech-arms deal, the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company etc. Nasser became a symbol of Arab nationalism and Arab unity. His popularity in the Arab world continued to grow. Nasser inevitably became the hero of the articulate masses in neighbouring Arab countries as well. 

But Nasser, a captive of his pan-Arab ideals, had to pay a heavy price for his policy of pan-Arabism because this policy brought him into confrontation not only with Western powers and Israel but also with the conservative and pro-Western Arab States. Egypt, despite the natural endowments of land and water,

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was a poor and less developed state. Nasser was deeply concerned with the economic and industrial development of Egypt. That needed resources, mostly foreign aid, and peace so that Egypt could devote itself to development. Both were denied to it. In 1956, not only was Egypt denied Western help for the construction of the High Dam but, in turn, was attacked by three powers when it nationalized the Suez Canal Company to raise resources to build the dam. The subsequent pro-Soviet tilt of Egypt, which became almost complete by 1965, caused antagonism with the West. And in 1967 when Egypt was half-way through its Second Five Year Plan phase, which had great emphasis upon industry, it was not only dragged into the June 1967 War but also into the long-drawn war of attrition that continued till August 1970 when a cease-fire was arranged under the Rogers' proposals. Thus, Nasser's desire to build a strong economy could not succeed. Yet his policy of non-alignment was largely to seek resources for the economic development of the country. It is worth appreciating that despite all the constraints, Egypt under Nasser was about to establish a strong economic infrastructure. Undoubtedly Nasser had his critics but he succeeded not only in acquiring but also in retaining the legitimacy of his non-aligned policy both in Egypt and abroad.

While trying to follow a policy of non-alignment per se, Nasser had also extended his hands for a meaningful international cooperation in that context. He was one of those protagonists of non-alignment who contributed to the evolution of a forum like the NAM in 1961. Egypt's contribution under Nasser was pioneering. Nasser, like other pioneers, provided the necessary fillip that the movement required during that time. Egypt's role was not only in active
participation but also in active formulation of policies. The movement had achieved tremendous heights during his period. It became a major force for the Westerners to contend with. Unfortunately the movement suffered a set-back in its way to transcendental heights when Nasser, one of its pioneers, passed away on 28 September 1970.

The sudden death of a man like Nasser who not only believed in NAM but also in pan-African movement and in Afro-Asian solidarity, stunned the world. It brought to an end an era of intensive political aura of Egypt especially centred round the non-aligned policy and NAM. The ultimate proof of the charisma of this pioneer of the NAM was the unabashed out-pouring of popular sorrow at his funeral.

His demise altered the balance of forces in the Arab world. In Egypt where he had dominated the country for fifteen long years, he left a gaping void. Nasser, the physical entity was gone, but not the Nasser - the symbol and the metaphor. Nasser embodied certain postulates which are still relevant today. His attempt in maintaining a correlationship between non-alignment policy and NAM was a practical demonstration which was conspicuously missing under his successor, Anwar al-Sadat. Sadat could not provide the Nasserite momentum, either to the non-alignment policy or to the NAM. Though the foreign policy of Sadat had a semblance to that of Nasser in the early years, it exhibited major differences in later years, thus, transforming Nasser’s foreign policy.

In October and November 1970 Sadat, in his capacity as the President Designate, reaffirmed his stand to pursue the policy of non-alignment, work for Arab unity and to support national liberation movements. But he began to drift
away from that policy. It is important to note that while he suppressed the so-called pro-Soviet personalities in Egypt, he signed a Friendship Treaty with the USSR, which Nasser had not even attempted. This significant undertaking by Sadat poses very pertinent questions. Did Sadat want to use the Soviet Union as a lever against the West to procure military and economic aid in large scale? Was it a tactical move or a strategic decision? As events proved it was only a tactical move. Thus, it is worth-noting that while Nasser had kept Egypt in the middle of the balance, in his relationship towards both the Super Powers, in the spirit of non-alignment policies, his successor showed important deviation from that path, since he swung from a pronounced pro-Soviet to a pronounced pro-US policy.

Thus, the policy of non-alignment had its first set-back. Unlike Nasser, Sadat's "Egypt First" attitude and subsequent complaint against Soviet economic and military policy towards Egypt turned Sadat's course. Sadat's attempt to unfreeze the Arab-Israeli stalemate subsequently led to the October War of 1973. It not only vindicated the Arab honour but also formed another decisive phase of Egyptian foreign policy. The War which witnessed the modest help of USSR to Egypt in military sphere was a turning point for Egypt-Soviet relationship. The subsequent ceasefire opened new friendship for Egypt in economic and military sphere. The year 1975/76 was again another bench-mark in Egyptian foreign policy. In 1975 Sadat not only signed the second disengagement agreement through US mediation but also visited United States, especially for economic and military aid. In 1976 Egypt's unilateral annulment of the Egypt-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1971 signalled a volte face in Egypt's foreign policy. This demarcating
phase formed another important watershed in Egyptian foreign policy like Nasser's 1955/56 and 1964/65. Sadat tilted heavily toward the USA thereafter. The policy of non-alignment, thus, entered into another critical phase under Sadat, in the face of Super Power conflict during the period of the new Cold War after 1978.

The dramatic steps which Sadat took in the reversal of Egypt's traditional Arab policy, especially in the context of Arab-Israeli confrontation, were his visit to Israeli-occupied Jerusalem in November 1977, his address to the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) on 20 November 1977, and the Camp David Summit in September 1978 leading to the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty on 26 March 1979.

Sadat's Egypt for the first time discarded the pan-Arab idea of Nasser and deviated from one of the major ideologies that Egypt glorified in. This deviation had a tremendous impact upon the psyche of a section among the Arabs who became hostile to Egypt. It had also a tremendous impact upon the non-aligned image of Egypt. The non-aligned image was not only denigrated but also suffered a humiliation at the hands of the 'rejectionist' front among the Arabs. It was even reflected in the deliberations of the NAM meetings. The Arab League, that Egypt was dominating, became one of the major forums of attack upon Egypt. Egypt was suspended not only from the Arab League membership but also from the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC). The reversal of Nasser's pan-Arabism and foreign policy under Sadat prompted the United States to establish special relations with Egypt particularly in economic and military field. Since 1975/76 the graph of Egypt-US economic and military relations started
changing dramatically.⁶ All these developments had a major role in transforming the non-aligned status of Egypt under Sadat.

In the Algiers NAM Summit of 1973 and also in the Colombo NAM Summit of 1976 the non-aligned status of Egypt was not questioned. It was only in the Havana NAM Summit of 1979, after Egypt had agreed to the Camp David Accord and the Peace Treaty with Israel, that Egypt's non-aligned status became controversial. Thanks to the diplomatic role of Boutros Boutros Ghali, who represented Egypt in that Summit, and the protective stands of India and other countries that Egypt could sustain the Arab-Islamic attack inside the NAM. While the policy of Egypt under Sadat had deviated from the Nasserite lines on the issues like the Palestine issue, its stand on crucial issues like Kampuchea and Afghanistan also had a pro-US turn. During these days Sadat's Egypt even supported the United States in UN General Assembly resolutions. The pro-US turn of Egypt was even reflected in the NAM. The cohesive group of NAM showed signs of divisive tendency. This was a major deviation of Sadat's Egypt from Nasserite lines.

The non-alignment policy and the NAM again entered into another phase when Sadat was assassinated and Mubarak took over the presidential rein. Sadat's assassination did not rouse sympathy, as compared to Nasser's death, either from the Egyptian masses or from the Arabs. It was an irony that the

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delirium that marked the death of Nasser, who had lost wars and territories as well, was matched by indifference for the death of a leader who had reportedly won wars and recovered the lost territories. It is also an irony that Nasser is being commemorated with profound veneration while Sadat is being utterly disregarded by sections of Egyptians. Therein lies the charisma of Nasser both in his success and in his failure.

Sadat’s Egypt, though claimed its reaffirmation to the policy of non-alignment and NAM, could not portray a non-aligned image similar to that of Egypt under Nasser. Rather the non-aligned status of Sadat’s Egypt became an enigma. However, under Hosni Mubarak, the non-aligned image of Egypt was retrieved. Mubarak’s search for a middle path, in the realm of foreign policy, has brought back the glory of non-alignment, reminiscent of Nasser era, in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The 1980s witnessed a delicate and important phase in the development of international relations. In the eighties, Mubarak had attempted and succeeded in rehabilitating Egypt in Arab, Islamic and non-aligned circles without introducing a sudden or major shift in Sadat’s foreign policy orientation. Emphasizing the continuity of Sadat’s policies towards the United States and Israel, he endeavoured to rehabilitate Egypt in the Arab-Islamic fold. Moreover, he has strived for a rapprochement with USSR which was once Nasser’s support base for strengthening Egyptian economy and military. Cairo no longer pronounces the vehement anti-Soviet attacks as was seen during Sadat. The process of detente and the end of the Cold War helped in that.
Mubarak's stress upon reorienting Egypt's non-aligned status has produced remarkable results. His emphasis during the early years of his presidency on the NAM, for a stronger impetus and reactivation and gearing up of the primary objectives in the current scenario, was very much appealing. Egypt's role, under him, in reviving the lost spirits of NAM and in it of a cohesive group, so that it would not be vulnerable to division, is worth-appreciating. In the context of regional antagonism reflected in the NAM during Sadat, Mubarak's stress to revitalize the NAM can be viewed as a wise step. Moreover, NAM could also provide a forum for a rapprochement of Egypt with Arab states during Mubarak as against the antagonism during Sadat period. Mubarak's non-aligned image was also moulded by Egypt's regional attitudes, like sympathy towards PLO, Jordan, Lebanon and also towards Iraq in its long-drawn war with Iran etc.

Events show that while trying hard to strengthen non-alignment, Mubarak has shown keen interest in Arab affairs and has sympathised with some of the causes. Mubarak has argued that the Camp David Agreements cannot prevent him from his Arab commitments. Thus, he condemned the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, withdrew the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv, and refused to visit Jerusalem because of its controversial status as the capital of Israel. Egypt, under him, has avoided all words of war against Arab states. Moreover, Mubarak has exchanged political notes with most Arab states. His support to the Palestinian cause and the reciprocity the PLO has shown towards him are all well-known phenomenon now. Egypt also supported Iraq in its long drawn, protracted war with Iran from 1980-88. Mubarak's change of attitude towards the fellow Arabs has enabled him to rehabilitate Egypt in the important Arab and Islamic
groupings - Arab League and Organisation of Islamic Conference. Moreover Egypt's leading role in Arab affairs as shown in Iraq-Kuwaiti crisis and Palestine-Israel negotiated peace settlement of 1993/94 are significant milestones. Egypt still follows a pro-Western policy, particularly due to Egypt's economic needs, and when the other Super Power, Soviet Union, is absent from the scene or at least is unable to provide the same support.

It is significant to note here that Egypt's attitudinal position, during the early phase of Mubarak, also maintained the continuance of Sadat's policy vis-a-vis the crises of Kampuchea and Afghanistan. In the UN General Assembly resolutions concerning both issues Egypt was in the vocal US group supporting the resolutions. This trend continued till the Eighth NAM Summit held at Harare in 1986. Egypt has been attacked by less recognised states and personalities like Libya's Gaddafi in the Summits. Still Mubarak's policy has been appreciated by several countries. Mubarak's Egypt in the eighties till now has been providing the cohesive phenomenon to the NAM.

Amidst divisive tendencies, the NAM has sustained for thirty-five years which, in itself, is a record achievement. The contribution of Egypt in the sustenance of this gigantic movement has been emphatic. Though Egypt's role has changed under different ruling elites on specific issues in the movement still Egypt's role as a major non-aligned state in the NAM has been of paramount importance.

Egyptian policy of non-alignment, which had its reflections in the NAM, witnessed several twists even crests and falls, under different ruling elites. That can be analysed under three major parameters; regime legitimacy, domestic compulsion and international option. Egyptian policy of non-alignment has been guided by these three parameters even from pre-Nasser period.

During the pre-Nasser period, Egyptian non-alignment basically symbolized a protest against the established imperialism as practised by the UK. During Nasser it was a policy of balance maintained by Egypt in its attitudes towards both the Super Powers as well as a challenge posed to them in pursuing a vigorous domestic and regional policy. During Sadat it represented a lever instead of a balance which deviated and shied away from the traditional middle path as followed by Nasser. Hence, the controversial shifts were prominently visualized. During Mubarak, the policy reverted back to the proximity of Nasserite path from the shifting positions of Sadat.

Thus, the Egyptian policy followed an unsteady graph under the different ruling elites. If Nasser's policy can be viewed to touch the zenith, it was Sadat's policy that witnessed the nadir. Mubarak follows a middle path. Thus, no Egyptian leader including Sadat and Mubarak had been able to elevate the non-aligned status of Egypt and attract the non-aligned imagination of Arabs as Nasser had done.