

# Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): Egypt

Egypt played a crucial role in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement during its formative years. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was an independent group of nations that did not join any of the two superpower blocs of the Cold War.

This article will focus on the role Egypt played in NAM under its President Gamal Abdel Nasser within the context of the IAS Exam

## Why was the NAM formed?

The principal aim of the Non-Aligned Movement was to foster economic development of newly independent nations and work towards the abolishment of imperialism and colonialism. Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Joseph Broz Tito of Yugoslavia and Jawaharlal Nehru of India were the principal founders of the movement.

Upon the end of World War II, the former Allies had split into the Soviet Union-led Warsaw Pact and the United States-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

The newly independent nations of Egypt and India were also enticed by both the blocs to join their respective alliances.

But the leaders of both the nations understood that being formal members of either the Warsaw Pact or NATO would have these two nations dictating its internal affairs.

Hence the need for a Non-Aligned Movement was realised.

## Egypt during the Cold War

Following a conference in Bandung in 1955, the Non-Aligned Movement was founded to help thaw out the Cold-War confrontations taking place. Although Egypt, like the rest of the members of the NAM, sought to remain neutral, the Socialist leanings of President Nasser inched Egypt towards the Soviet Union's sphere of influences.

The matter was further complicated due to two key events:

1. The Construction of the Aswan Dam
2. The Nationalisation of the Suez Canal

In order to mitigate the disastrous effect when the Nile river used to flood annually, Nasser sought to build the Aswan Dam the banks of the Nile. The problem was that to finance such a huge project would mean taking a loan from either the Soviet Union or the United States. Each had its own set of conditions in providing the required loan but Nasser found the Soviet terms to

be far more palatable. In addition, the USSR was also against the formation of Israel which suited Nasser's anti-Zionist ideologies just fine.

The Nationalisation of the Suez Canal was done to raise further funds for the construction of the Aswan Dam. The underlying reason was that Nasser saw the British and French control of the Suez Canal as the last vestige of colonialism in Egypt and he sought to end it by either violent or non-violent means.

When generous offers to buy the controlling rights of the Suez Canal were turned down by Britain and France, Nasser directed his military to forcibly seize it. This set off the Suez Crisis of 1955-1956 where Egypt was invaded by the combined forces of Britain, France and Israel with the objective of taking back the Suez Canal.

The Soviet Union supplied arms and ammunition to the beleaguered Egyptian army during the Suez crisis and at the same time threw its weight around in the United Nations to get the three aggressors to withdraw from Egypt. A combination of Soviet nuclear threat and American economic sanctions forced all three nations to withdraw from Egypt in its entirety by 1956. President Nasser's firm stand in the face of adversity made him the hero of the Arab world and earned Egypt significant clout as a result.

The Soviet support during this occasion was the reason why Egypt came under the influence of the Soviet Union as a result but staying true to the principles of Non-Aligned, Egypt played both sides of the Cold war for its own advancement. It would not be until the end of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 would Egypt completely leave the Soviet Sphere in its entirety.

## Gamal Abdel Nasser Legacy on the Non-Aligned Movement

Egypt played a major role in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement and still continues to be an important member of the present day. President Nasser's vision of an Afro-Asian solidarity shaped the formative years of the NAM

His influence also spread to the rest of the Arab world as his adoption of a non-aligned policy encouraged other Arab nations to become neutral in their approach to diplomacy regarding the Western and Eastern bloc. The neutrality of Egypt showed that the Middle East could be free from Western influence although they viewed Egypt to be inching closer to the Soviet bloc

Increasingly after 1955, Nasser and the Egyptian press emphasized neutralism or non-aligned with either of the world-power blocs as the foreign policy most suitable for the newly liberated colonies of Africa and Asia.

Nasser's vision called for a collective union of developing nations who could freely work on their own problems, analysing them and finding solutions. In short, Nasser advocated non-interference from the two power blocs when it came to foreign policy of the newly independent states of Asia.

Ruling Egypt from 1954 until his death in 1970, Nasser remains a symbol of dignity, anti-Zionism, decolonisation, pan-Arabism, and above all social justice for many. The sentiment expressed by President Nasser and his vision for the solidarity of developing countries is relevant even today.