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Q2(a)

Discuss the relevance of the normative ethos of the Non-Aligned Movement in magnifying India's soft power in pursuit of her national interest

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 2 · 20 marks · Key concepts in International Relations

Key concepts in International Relations: National interest, Security and power; Balance of power and deterrence; Transnational actors and collective security; World capitalist economy and globalisation.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the ethos of the Non-Aligned Movement and show how that ethos supports India's soft power
- Write at 20-mark length

Revision summary

NAM's ethos is non-membership of Cold War blocs, sovereignty, and anti-colonial solidarity.

Belgrade 1961 organised a movement, not an army.

India's founder role still reads as diplomatic autonomy in much of Africa and Asia.

Nye's soft power here is legitimacy and voice, carried by training, vaccines, UN work, and Global South summits.

The ethos is strained by a large membership and by India's later multi-alignment, but it has not been discarded.

Introduction

The Non-Aligned Movement was organised as a diplomatic identity, not as a military bloc. Its ethos is independent judgment, anti-colonial solidarity, and peaceful coexistence. India used that ethos from Belgrade onward, and still uses it as a source of soft power among developing States.

Body

Ethos of NAM

- **Bandung in 1955 and Belgrade in 1961 set the core:** no membership of Cold War military alliances, respect for sovereignty, and opposition to colonialism and racial domination.
- **Jawaharlal Nehru**, Josip Broz Tito, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, and Sukarno treated non-alignment as the right to decide each issue, not as equidistance as a formula.
- Panchsheel and the UN Charter language of peaceful coexistence supplied the moral vocabulary.
- The ethos was South-South consultation, economic self-reliance talk, and nuclear-disarmament pressure on both camps.
- It was never a command structure. Consensus and a rotating chair were the method, which later made the movement large and slow, a point taken up in 3(a).

India inside that ethos

- India was a founder and a regular chair and host. It linked NAM to the Commonwealth, the UN, and later to the G77 without becoming a treaty ally of either superpower.
- During the Cold War this gave India voice among Afro-Asian States even when the 1971 Treaty with the USSR looked, to critics, like a tilt.
- After the Cold War, India did not dissolve NAM. It kept the forum while adding other clubs.

Soft power

- **Joseph Nye's** soft power is attraction through culture, values, and perceived legitimacy of policy, not through force or payment alone.
- NAM ethos supplies India with a story of autonomy that many African, Asian, and Latin American governments still recognise.
- Vaccine supplies, **ITEC** training, disaster relief, and the **Voice of Global South Summit** rest on that recognition more than on NAM communiqués.
- At the United Nations, India can speak as a large democracy that was not a NATO or Warsaw Pact member, which still matters in votes and in peacekeeping politics.
- G20 presidency in 2023, including the African Union's seating, used the same South-facing language.

Limits

- Soft power is reduced when neighbours contest India's regional role, or when NAM itself is divided on Ukraine, Myanmar, or Palestine.
- Multi-alignment with the Quad and with Russia is a later practice. It does not erase the NAM vocabulary; it sits beside it.
- Ethos without delivery of development finance is a thin resource next to China's capital.

Flow diagram

Bandung Belgrade -> NAM ethos autonomy
NAM ethos autonomy -> India founder role
India founder role -> Soft power Global South
Soft power Global South -> UN G20 ITEC

Conclusion

NAM's ethos is independent choice, anti-colonial solidarity, and peaceful coexistence without a military headquarters. India draws soft power from being seen as an originator of that ethos, provided policy still looks autonomous and useful to the Global South.

Facts & figures

Belgrade 1961

First NAM summit; India among the founding governments.

Bandung 1955

Asian-African Conference that supplied principles later used by NAM.

Joseph Nye

Soft power as attraction through values and culture rather than coercion or payment.

ITEC

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme that trains officials from partner developing countries.

Voice of Global South Summit

Indian-hosted consultation of developing countries around the G20 year 2023.

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