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Azerbaijan and the Non-Aligned Movement: Institutionalizing the “Balanced Foreign Policy” Doctrine

by Jason E. Strakes

ABSTRACT

Observers of post-Soviet Eurasia have extended various explanations for Azerbaijan’s decision to enter the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in May 2011. Yet, rather than representing a drastic shift in its external orientation, Baku’s participation in the NAM should be recognized as a natural extension of its longstanding “balanced foreign policy” doctrine, originally introduced by second post-independence president Heydar Aliyev in response to the crisis conditions of the early 1990s. Azerbaijan has currently reached a level of national development that allows it to pursue multidirectional options. In addition, its increasing diplomatic engagements with states and international organizations in the Third World/Global South (Asia, Africa, Middle East and Latin America) during the past decade offer a means of both diversifying its external relations beyond the major powers and avoiding the asymmetric accession requirements of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian institutions. Azerbaijan’s membership in the NAM therefore provides it with a formal foundation for its independent foreign policy that potentially reinforces its leadership position within and beyond the South Caucasus region.

Azerbaijan | Foreign policy | Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)



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You can't be friends with some countries and enemies with others despite the fact that this is the way most countries function. Azerbaijan doesn't want to be an enemy with any country. At the same time, we will not become victim to another country's policies. Azerbaijan has its own independent policy. At the same time, we are developing good relations with Europe and America and seek to benefit from their experiences while preserving our own national identity and our own resources.

Heydar Aliyev, 1999¹

Introduction

On 25 May 2011, Azerbaijan became the fourth former Soviet republic (following Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Belarus) to enter full membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), advancing beyond the observer status it had previously shared with Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Ukraine. As the premier institution of 20th-century “Third Worldism,” the NAM has often been conventionally regarded as an ineffectual relic of Cold War bipolarity, rather than an actor relevant to the post-communist space. In recent years, various explanations for this decision have been extended by analysts, observers and policymakers alike. Opposition figures and Western integration advocates identified it as an assertive response to criticism of Azerbaijan's domestic policies by the European Parliament.²

¹ Interviewed by Betty Blair, “Looking Back on the Century, Personally and Professionally”, in *Azerbaijan International*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Winter 1999), p. 20, http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/74_folder/74.articles/74_aliyev3.html.

² Arifa Kazimova, “Azerbaijan Joins Ranks of Non-Aligned Movement”, in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 25 May 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan_join_nonaligned_movement/24200776.html; Rashad Shirinov, “Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: Seeking a Balance”, in

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Government-affiliated experts assert that it was intended to reassure Moscow of its lack of ambitions for NATO membership in the aftermath of the 2008 South Ossetia War.³ Others interpret it as a signal to the US and Western governments of a conscious change in direction due to a perceived lack of support for resolving the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.⁴

Yet, rather than representing a drastic shift in its external orientation, Baku's participation in the NAM is probably best understood as a natural extension of the “balanced foreign policy” (*balanslaşdırılmış xarici siyasət*) doctrine introduced by second post-independence president Heydar Aliyev in the early 1990s. This essentially informal realist approach was initiated in the context of the severe challenges posed by domestic instability, encirclement by hostile regional powers and the loss of sovereignty over nearly one-fifth of the national territory to Armenian occupying forces. Its primary object was to maintain the country's autonomy while deriving beneficial resources from constructive engagements with three major geopolitical actors, despite their attendant liabilities for Azerbaijani national interests: the US (versus withholding of foreign assistance under Section 907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act), the Russian Federation (versus official and clandestine military support for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh separatists) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (versus political and economic support for Armenia and sponsorship of religious radicalism). At the same time, Turkey was afforded the position of “fraternal republic” through intimate treaty-based security and economic cooperation, rather than a patron state based upon ethnic and linguistic affiliation. Lastly, participation in Euro-Atlantic programmes and structures would proceed gradually in the form of mutually supportive partnerships rather than the active pursuit of member status.⁵ This posture contrasts significantly with demands

Caucasus Analytical Digest, No. 37 (29 March 2012), p. 4, http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/DetailansichtPubDB_EN?rec_id=2117.

³ Interview with Farhad Mammedov, Director of SAM, October 2014.

⁴ Paul Goble, “Azerbaijan Joins the Non-Aligned Movement”, in *Azerbaijan in the World: ADA Biweekly Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 11 (1 June 2011), http://biweekly.ada.edu.az/vol_4_no_11/Azerbaijan_joins_the_Non_Aligned_movement.htm; Murad Ismayilov, “Power, Knowledge, and Pipelines: Understanding the Politics of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy”, in *Caucasus Survey*, Vol. 2, No. 1-2 (November 2014), p. 97-98.

⁵ Glen E. Howard, “NATO and the Caucasus: The Caspian Axis”, in Stephen J. Blank (ed.), *NATO After Enlargement: New Challenges, New Missions, New Forces*, Carlisle Barracks, Strategic Studies Institute, September 1998, p. 180, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB140.pdf>; Maria Raquel Freire and Licinia Simão, “Integration Processes in the Caucasus: The Global and the Regional in Perspective in the Cases of the EU and NATO”, in Caucasian Research Institute, *Caucasus and Central Asia in the Globalization Process II International Congress*, Baku, Qafqaz University, 2007, p. 1130-1139, http://www.qu.edu.az/downloads/publications/Kitab_III_Full.pdf; Elmar Mammadyarov, “The Cooperation in the Framework of EAPC/PFP - Perspective of Azerbaijan”, in *Crossroads: The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2007), p. 218-221; Martin Malek, “NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on Different Tracks”, in *Connections*, Vol. 7, Summer Supplement (2008), p. 33, <https://pfpconsortium.org/node/1528141>; International Crisis Group, “Azerbaijan: Defence Sector Management and Reform”, in *ICG Europe Briefings*, No. 50, 29 October 2008, p. 5-6, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/azerbaijan/b050-azerbaijan-defence-sector-management-and-reform.aspx>; Kamal Makili-Aliyev, “Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: Between East and West”, in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 13|05 (January 2013), p. 9-10, <http://www.iai.it/en/node/385>.

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for the aid and intervention of external powers extended by the leadership of other South Caucasus states in order to preserve national security during the post-Soviet period (Russia by Tar-Petrosian, Kocharian and Sargsyan in Armenia, and both Russia and the US by Shevardnadze and Saakashvili in Georgia).⁶

However, while this strategy has been referenced specifically in various presidential and ministerial public statements, as well as in the 2007 National Security Concept,⁷ at the same time (unlike the enshrinement of “permanent neutrality” in the national constitutions of both Moldova and Turkmenistan), its basic principles are not outlined in any particular official document. This is likely because a distinctive Azerbaijani variant of “multi-vectorism” was forged by the president as a strategy of survival necessary to manage conditions of acute crisis and immediate threats to the nation’s existence in the early post-Soviet period. Yet in the present day, Azerbaijan has reached a level of national development and economic prosperity – reporting the world’s highest consecutive rate of growth in gross domestic product (GDP) and decline in the poverty rate from nearly 50 to less than 16 percent between 2001 and 2008⁸ – that allows it to pursue multidirectional options to their furthest potential. Second, its increasing diplomatic engagements with states and organizations in the Global South⁹ during the past decade offers a means of diversifying its external relations beyond both the major powers and asymmetric accession requirements of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian institutions. Therefore, the conventional view of Baku’s entry into the NAM as simply a short-term reaction to current regional trends does not provide a satisfactory explanation, as there is a historical precedent of prior contacts and interactions that must be accounted for. The present study instead proposes two main linkages between Azerbaijan’s NAM membership and its domestic politics. First, it formalizes and strengthens the foreign policy concept introduced by the executive by providing it with an anchor or foundation in an institution that is recognized by the international community, thus representing a next stage in the evolution of its independently defined foreign policy. Secondly, its position in the NAM provides it with a forum to pursue its self-identified status as a “regional leader” in the South Caucasus¹⁰ based upon its high

⁶ Jason E. Strakes, “Situating the ‘Balanced Foreign Policy’: The Role of System Structure in Azerbaijan’s Multi-Vector Diplomacy”, in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (March 2013), p. 38.

⁷ See *National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, Unofficial translation, 23 May 2007, p. 3, 12, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lang=en&id=154917>.

⁸ See Asian Development Bank, “Azerbaijan”, in *Asian Development Outlook 2009: Rebalancing Asia’s Growth*, March 2009, p. 131, <http://www.adb.org/node/27704>; Harun Onder, *Azerbaijan: Inclusive Growth in a Resource-Rich Economy*, Washington, World Bank, 2013, p. 8, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/12228>.

⁹ The term “Global South” is used in contemporary international studies to refer to the geographic areas (Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America) formerly known as the “Third World” or “developing nations,” or in the Russian/Soviet Orientalist tradition as “Southern” or “Asian and African” countries.

¹⁰ *Development Concept “Azerbaijan-2020”*, 29 December 2012. Draft version available in the UNDP website: http://www.az.undp.org/content/dam/azerbaijan/docs/sustain_development/AZ_Vision2020_government_draft_en.pdf; Georgia Chantzi, “The Emergence of Azerbaijan as Regional Leader: Development and Sustainability”, in *ICBSS Policy Briefs*, No. 28 (September 2013),

level of economic development in a manner analogous to IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa), the ASEAN founders (Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand) or middle-income countries such as Egypt, Mexico, Nigeria and Israel in their respective geographic locales,¹¹ thus transcending the dependence on major power patrons traditionally exhibited by Armenia and Georgia. The analysis proceeds as follows: The first section identifies the logical compatibility between the established precepts of Azerbaijani foreign policy and the principles and contemporary purposes of the NAM. The second highlights the institutional structure and function of the NAM in comparison with other international organizations, and its suitability to Azerbaijan’s domestic political preferences. The third examines the historical record of Azerbaijan’s participation and activities in the NAM in the context of cross-regional diplomacy. Finally, it concludes with the implications of NAM membership for Azerbaijan’s future national development and foreign policy trajectory.

1. Azerbaijan and NAM: principles and objectives

The participation of former Soviet republics in international organizations historically associated with the Third World remains a highly understudied topic. Earlier studies on the factors influencing foreign policies of post-communist states conclude that, save for Moldova, Turkmenistan and Belarus, post-independence governments have generally rejected neutrality as a conceptual guide for their external relations due to its lack of pertinence to the post-Cold War era.¹² One recent account of Azerbaijan’s growing assertiveness and the narrowing of its foreign policy agenda to energy exports and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, along with its increased engagement with Asian countries, characterizes its decision to enter the NAM as “an initiative with no real political significance.”¹³ On one hand, such commentaries reflect traditional appraisals dating to the early years of the NAM, which have often concentrated upon its supposed contradictions and failings as a political movement.¹⁴ In particular, these writings typically emphasize its essential lack of cohesion and ineffectuality, as idealistic pronouncements (such as Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s Five Principles of Coexistence) and lofty goals such as neutrality or disarmament were frequently overruled by the “national interest.” Many of the NAM member states eventually convened treaties with either

<http://icbss.org/index.php?pid=912&cid=196>.

¹¹ Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002; Detlef Nolte, “How to Compare Regional Powers: Analytical Concepts and Research Topics”, in *Review of International Studies*, No. 36, No. 4 (October 2010), p. 881-901, <http://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/node/951>.

¹² Rick Fawn, “Ideology and National Identity in Post-communist Foreign Policies”, in Rick Fawn (ed.), *Ideology and National Identity in Post-communist Foreign Policies*, London and Portland, Frank Cass, 2004, p. 24.

¹³ Aleksandra Jarosiewicz, “Azerbaijan: A Growing Problem for the West”, in *OSW Commentary*, No. 146 (15 September 2014), p. 3, n9, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/node/22526>.

¹⁴ G.H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, London, Faber and Faber, 1966.

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of the superpowers, and both purchased and produced massive quantities of conventional or in some cases, nuclear weapons.¹⁵ Yet, such critiques are often based upon a misconception of the practical purposes of nonalignment, which were to maintain strategic autonomy and flexibility while promoting the cultural, political and economic interests of developing nations through both formal and informal instruments.¹⁶ Reflecting the intent to overcome the legacy of colonial domination, its proponents have therefore advocated a multilateral balancing doctrine, in which fluid alliances are self-help mechanisms and the pursuit of parity in both economic and military capabilities is a necessary corollary of interstate cooperation. Yet rather than a sole reliance on power politics, nonalignment also assumes that international law should set standards for diplomatic conduct. It therefore reflects a progressive view of anarchy in international politics: Rather than relying upon a central institution for enforcement, state behaviour is tempered by international legal agreements and strictures that regulate state interaction and reduce the likelihood of conflict.¹⁷ It is further important to recognize that the political leaders who defined the principles of NAM did not seek to form a third or alternate bloc in order to serve as a counterbalance against the influence of the superpowers.¹⁸ This conclusion is supported by early empirical research which indicates that, contrary to common Western assumptions, nonalignment was not conceived in response to a perception of an impending US or Soviet military threat.¹⁹

Thus, the NAM continues to operate upon the ten normative principles established at the founding 1955 Bandung Conference and reaffirmed by each Summit. These are distinctive in the extent to which they prioritize sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as the rejection of “collective defence” imposed by the major powers. Most importantly, according to the five principles declared at the 1961 Preparatory Conference of the 1st Summit in Cairo, Egypt, a potential member state should both exhibit an “independent foreign policy,” and should not participate in multilateral alliances, bilateral military agreements or regional defence pacts, or host foreign bases when concluded in the context of great power conflicts.²⁰

¹⁵ Satish Kumar, “Nonalignment: International Goals and National Interests”, in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (April 1983), p. 445-462.

¹⁶ Cecil V. Crabb Jr., “The Testing of Non-Alignment”, in *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 3. (September 1964), p. 517-542; Irene Brown, “Studies on Non-alignment”, in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (December 1966), p. 517-527.

¹⁷ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*, 3rd ed., New York, Columbia University Press, 2002.

¹⁸ William M. LeoGrande, “Evolution of the Nonaligned Movement”, in *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January-February 1980), p. 37, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/ProblemsCommunism-1980jan-00035>.

¹⁹ Nazli Choucri, “The Perceptual Base of Nonalignment”, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (March 1969), p. 57-74.

²⁰ Houman A. Sadri, “Nonalignment as a Foreign Policy Strategy: Dead or Alive”, in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring 1999), p. 120-121; James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, “Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)”, in *Inventory of International Nonproliferation Organizations and Regimes*, last updated October 2012, p. 1, <http://cns.miis.edu/inventory/pdfs/nam.pdf>.

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Thus, common assumptions of the obsolescence of the NAM fail to recognize its continued function as a forum for the expression of varying state preferences, as member governments seek to manage or oppose the grand strategies of preponderant powers, which may extend to both the pursuit of unilateralism by the US since the 1990s²¹ as well as Russia’s consolidation of its regional sphere of influence. As such, some native scholars contend that pressures for democratization imposed by the US and Western governments are perceived by senior Azerbaijani elites as a form of “neoimperialism” equivalent to Russian dominance.²² Additionally, arguments for the contemporary irrelevance of the NAM cannot account for a considerable increase in membership to 120 countries (a total of 24 since 1989²³) as well as participation with observer status²⁴ (a total of 17²⁵) including several former Soviet republics, while the applications of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Costa Rica were rejected due to questions of sovereignty in 1995 and 1998. These far exceed the withdrawal of Argentina (which rejoined as an observer in 2009), the suspension of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and the loss of Cyprus and Malta to the EU between 1991 and 2004.²⁶ It is also arguable that the US-Soviet opposition was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the emergence of the NAM, as its inherent purpose was for newly independent states to establish themselves within the international order while still preserving their autonomy, and the pursuit of political and economic equality via maximizing their collective resources for representation in international forums.²⁷

According to this view, the primary division within the NAM in the post-Cold War decades has been between those states which continue to utilize it as a platform for radical challenges to the political and economic pre-eminence of the major powers, and those which have adopted a more moderate and accommodating stance within

²¹ Deepa Ollapally, “Third World Nationalism and the United States After the Cold War”, in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 110, No. 3 (Autumn 1995), p. 417-434; Baskara T. Wardaya, “Global Solidarity against Unilateralism”, in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2005), p. 476-486.

²² Murad Ismayilov, “Power, Knowledge, and Pipelines”, cit.

²³ These include Venezuela (1989), Burma/Myanmar (1961-1980, returned 1992), Brunei (1993), Guatemala (1993), Mongolia (1993), Papua New Guinea (1993), Philippines (1993), Thailand (1993), Uzbekistan (1993), South Africa (1994), Eritrea (1995), Honduras (1995), Turkmenistan (1995), Belarus (1998), Dominican Republic (2000), Saint Vincent-Grenadines (2003), Timor-Leste (2003), Antigua and Barbuda (2006), Dominica (2006), Haiti (2006), Saint Kitts-Nevis (2006), Azerbaijan (2011) and Fiji (2011).

²⁴ See *Final Document* (NAM 2011/Doc.1/Rev.1), para. 22, XVI Ministerial Conference and Commemorative Meeting, Bali, 23-27 May 2011, <http://namiran.org/bali-2011>.

²⁵ These include Argentina, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, El Salvador, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Montenegro, Paraguay, Serbia, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uruguay.

²⁶ Cedric Grant, “Equity in International Relations: A Third World Perspective”, in *International Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (July 1995), p. 583; Jacqueline Anne Braveboy-Wagner, *Institutions of the Global South*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 18; Arshad Rasool and Arihal Pulwama, “Non-Aligned Movement in 21st Century: Relevant or Redundant? ...A Debate”, in *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (May-June 2013), p. 66-69, <http://dx.doi.org/10.9790/0837-1146470>.

²⁷ Joelien Pretorius, “Non-Alignment in the Current World Order: The Impact of the Rise of China”, in *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2008), p. 3-4, <http://hdl.handle.net/10566/472>.

the international system.²⁸ As such, Azerbaijani policymakers have publicly justified their participation in the NAM not according to common assumptions about its roots in bipolarity, but in reference to its original normative vision of international politics. As stated by Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov:

The end of the Cold War has in no way diminished the unique role of the NAM. In our view, the philosophy of the NAM was not about rejecting the bipolar world. [...] It is also neither about [the] number of blocks and poles, nor disengaging neutrality. For us, its primary mission was and remains to help maintain justice and equality in international relations, to ensure respect for norms and principles of the international law and the right and freedom of sovereign nations to [...] take action against injustice irrespective of who perpetuates it.²⁹

2. Azerbaijan and institutional characteristics of NAM

The essential distinction between the NAM and contemporary European institutions such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), EU, NATO and the Council of Europe (CoE), as well as the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is that it possesses neither a formal charter or constitution, nor a treasury, nor a central decision-making apparatus. Instead, it is administered by a rotating secretariat or Coordinating Bureau (CoB) first introduced in 1973, which is based at UN headquarters in New York and chaired by the Permanent Representative of a single country for a three-year period. This intimate linkage to the UN system has historically served as a mechanism for the internationalization of domestic issues, thus providing a common foreign policy for weaker states.³⁰ However, the CoB has a largely functional status, as the primary deliberative bodies of the NAM are the collective Summit (formally the Conference of Heads of State and Government) held in the chairing country every three years, which defines policy positions and adopts resolutions, and the interim Ministerial Meeting and Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), which resolves to implement Summit decisions and action plans. The Cartagena Document on Methodology introduced in May 1996 serves as the closest facsimile of written bylaws for NAM procedures.³¹ This inherently non-hierarchical and inclusive design was intended to provide

²⁸ Jacqueline Anne Braveboy-Wagner, *Institutions of the Global South*, cit., p. 24-25.

²⁹ Statement by Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of Non-Aligned Movement, Sharm El Sheikh, 7-10 May 2012, http://www.azembassy.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75&Itemid=235.

³⁰ Houman A. Sadri, “Nonalignment as a Foreign Policy Strategy: Dead or Alive”, cit., p. 128-129.

³¹ *Cartagena Document on Methodology*, adopted at the Ministerial Meeting of the Committee on Methodology, Cartagena, 14-16 May 1996, <http://www.nam.gov.za/background/methodology.htm#METHODOLOGY>.

smaller states with a means of challenging the hegemony of the great powers.³² Another important contrast is that rather than a staged accession process which involves the asymmetric imposition of requirements for domestic legal and institutional reforms to render compatibility with the European *acquis communautaire*, the criteria for NAM membership are limited to adherence to and solidarity with the ten Bandung principles. One commentary from a Russian perspective suggests that its continued viability may lie in that despite its standard of inclusion of highly diverse participants, it has possibly achieved greater commonality of positions on major international issues than attempts at integration among a smaller number of actors such as the CIS.³³ Another critical Russian analyst identifies its lack of unanimity as both a weakness and a strength: While its decentralized structure inhibits the formation of formal coalitions in response to major security concerns, its horizontal format and wide diversity of preferences contribute to its democratic internal character and ability to interface with global institutions.³⁴ Its enduring significance thus lies in enabling developing countries to select policies and practices according to their national interests, rather than those determined by alliances or institutions dominated by the major powers.³⁵ Interestingly, while Azerbaijan has had relatively limited experience with the mechanisms and practices of the NAM, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during its brief period of membership it has been critical of the methodology, particularly the lack of clearly defined procedures, thus identifying the need for its revision and improvement.³⁶ This view is corroborated by Mammadyarov’s statement at the 16th Ministerial Meeting:

In order to realize a more coordinated and efficient Movement capable of responding to a rapidly changing international environment in an effective manner, we have to explore new ways and means. It could be both strengthening the existing mechanisms, including Coordinating Bureau, Working Groups or Caucuses and finding new ways of better coordination and representation.³⁷

In addition, the relative freshness of post-Soviet activity in the NAM (as further exemplified by the acceptance of Tajikistan as an observer in 2009³⁸) suggests an

³² A.W. Singham and Shirley Hune, *Non-alignment in an Age of Alignments*, London, Zed Books, 1986, p. 36-37.

³³ Alexander Orlov, “The Non-Aligned Movement: 40 Years After”, in *International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2002), p. 54.

³⁴ Evgeny Astakhov, “The Non-Aligned Movement Today”, in *RIAC Multipolar World Analysis*, 26 November 2012, http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=1084.

³⁵ Johnmary Kelechi Ani, “The Role of Non-Aligned Movement in Contemporary International Conflict Management”, in *Uzu: Journal of History and International Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (December 2012), p. 179-192, <http://dspace.funai.edu.ng/xmlui/handle/123456789/389>.

³⁶ Interview with Qaya Mammadov, Director of International Security Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 December 2014.

³⁷ “Azerbaijan joins non-aligned group”, in *AzerNews*, 26 May 2011, <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/33126.html>.

³⁸ See *Report by Rapporteur-General* (NAM 2009/MM/DOC. 7/REV.1), para. 19-20, Ministerial

opportunity to utilize the institution for novel purposes, especially as an alternative means to achieve its broader foreign policy goals.

3. NAM and Azerbaijan’s Global South diplomacy

While mainstream scholars have increasingly begun to acknowledge non-alignment as a logical continuation of Azerbaijan’s longstanding foreign policy strategy,³⁹ few if any have seriously explored its implications for cross-regional cooperation. One recent publication which concedes Baku’s avoidance of exclusive alignments with either Russia or the West omits Uzbekistan, which entered the NAM in 1993, while stating incorrectly that “Turkmenistan has been officially neutral since independence, but never joined the NAM.”⁴⁰ Yet, the precedents for enhanced post-Soviet-Global South relationships were actually laid during the past decade, in which states in Central Asia and the Caucasus have increasingly sought partnerships in the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia. These have been supplemented in recent years by evolving ties with Latin American and African countries.⁴¹ Azerbaijan was first granted observer status in the NAM at the 11th Ministerial Meeting in Cairo, Egypt from 31 May to 4 June 1994, nearly concurrent with the signature of the “Contract of the Century” with foreign oil prospecting firms and entry into the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. In a subsequent address to the 49th Session of the UN General Assembly, Heydar Aliyev asserted that it “provides us with a broad opportunity for the establishment of bilateral contacts in various fields and for the *rapprochement* of our positions with those of the States members of the Movement.”⁴² While perhaps reflective of a strategy of joining multiple international organizations in the years following independence, this statement is significant, as it suggests that Baku’s initial interest was in expanding its diplomatic portfolio with individual countries rather than the principles or objectives of the NAM. However, while Azerbaijani representatives attended the Ministerial Meeting of the CoB in Indonesia and the 11th Summit in

Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau, Havana, 27-30 April 2009, <http://namiran.org/havana-2009>.

³⁹ Rashad Shirinov, “Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy: Seeking a Balance”, cit., p. 4; Rovshan Ibrahimov, “Dvizheniye neprisoedineniya kak instrument realizatsii natsional’nykh interesov Azerbaydzhana” (The Non-Aligned Movement as an instrument for the realisation of Azerbaijan’s national interests”, in *1News.Az*, 11 May 2012, <http://www.1news.az/authors/ribrahimov/20120511104117876.html>; Chatham House, *Meeting Summary: Azerbaijan: External Relations, Internal Realities*, 11 January 2013, p. 5-6, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/node/2672>; Rovshan Ibrahimov, “U.S.-Azerbaijan Relations: A View From Baku”, in *Rethink Papers*, No. 17 (October 2014), <http://wp.me/p3TIQJ-bJ>.

⁴⁰ Svante E. Cornell, “Azerbaijan: Going It Alone”, in S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (eds.), *Putin’s Grand Strategy. The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, Washington, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2014, p. 148, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/publications/silkroad-papers-and-monographs/item/13053>.

⁴¹ Zaur Shiriyevev and Kornely Kakachia, “Azerbaijan-Georgian Relations: The Foundations and Challenges of the Strategic Alliance”, Special issue of *SAM Review*, Vol. 7-8 (July 2013), p. 36.

⁴² UN General Assembly, *Official Records, 49th Session, 11th Meeting (A/49/PV.11)*, 29 September 1994, p. 6, <http://undocs.org/A/49/PV.11>.

Cartagena, Colombia in 1995 along with Armenia and Kyrgyzstan,⁴³ as well as the 12th Ministerial Conference in New Delhi, India with Ukraine in 1997, according to published documents Baku did not send delegates to the 1998,⁴⁴ 2000,⁴⁵ 2002,⁴⁶ 2003⁴⁷ or 2004⁴⁸ summits or interim meetings. This extended period of inactivity despite initial interest might be attributed to several factors. First, during the first decade of independence, the priority of the leadership was to integrate with the international community, attract support necessary to rebuild the country and end its isolation after seventy years of Soviet rule, whereas the NAM has traditionally been regarded as a forum for rejecting great-power influence and advocating reform of or even radical challenges to the international order. Thus, at this time continued participation was possibly deemed neither relevant nor attractive. Secondly, during this period policymakers were preoccupied with engagement with Euro-Atlantic and regional institutions, including the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process presided over by the OSCE Minsk Group since 1994, concluding its first Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU and the CIS Agreement on Cooperation of Interior Ministries in 1996, gaining admission to the CoE in 2001 and receiving its first NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in 2005. At the same time, the NAM criterion of abstention from formal alliances led by great powers may have been viewed as a possible hindrance to continued engagement with NATO.

Yet, during the presidency of Ilham Aliyev, NATO integration has not advanced beyond the IPAP stage, while Azerbaijan has neither met requirements for nor sought to advance to a Membership Action Plan (MAP), thus maintaining compatibility with NAM standards.⁴⁹ Second, its active participation (since admission in December 1991) in the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which also holds observer status in NAM, has brought it into regular and sustained contact with mutual members. An additional catalyst for Azerbaijan’s renewed activity in the NAM can be located in its evolving bilateral relations with two of

⁴³ *Communiqué*, Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau, Bandung, 25-27 April 1995, p. 6, <http://undocs.org/A/49/920>; Basic Documents of the XI Summit, Cartagena, 18-20 October 1995, p. 3-4, <http://www.nam.gov.za/xisummit>.

⁴⁴ Basic Documents of the XII Summit, Durban, 2-3 September 1998, <http://www.nam.gov.za/xiisummit>.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Rapporteur-General*, XIII Ministerial Conference, Cartagena, 8-9 April 2000, <http://www.nam.gov.za/xiiiminconf>.

⁴⁶ *Report of the Rapporteur-General*, Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau, Durban, 27-29 April 2002, <http://www.nam.gov.za/minmeet/rapp165a.htm>.

⁴⁷ *Report of the Rapporteur-General*, XIII Summit, Kuala Lumpur, 20-25 February 2003, <http://www.nam.gov.za/media/030227a.htm>.

⁴⁸ See List of Participants of the XIV Ministerial Conference, Durban, 17-19 August 2004, <http://www.nam.gov.za/media/040816nam.htm>.

⁴⁹ Leyla Alieva, “Reassessing EU and NATO Engagement: Lost Opportunities and Ways Forward”, in Ernst M. Felberbauer and Frederic Labarre (eds.), *De-conflicting Protracted Conflicts in the South Caucasus: The Role of the EU and NATO*, Vienna, National Defence Academy, January 2013, p. 31-41, <http://www.bundesheer.at/wissen-forschung/publikationen/publikation.php?id=669>; Kamal Makili-Aliyev, “Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy: Between East and West”, cit., p. 9-10.

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its founding states: Cuba and Indonesia. In accordance with its burgeoning associations with the latter as the world’s most populous Muslim-majority nation and leading player in OIC, representatives of Azerbaijan and all five Central Asian republics were attendees of the April 2005 Asian-African Summit held in Jakarta on the 50th anniversary of the 1955 Bandung Conference – the precursor to NAM – while Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan were signatories to the Declaration on The New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), which sought to revitalize its objectives for the 21st century.⁵⁰ The document also laid the foundations for the NAASP Capacity Building for Palestine *Coordinating Unit* co-chaired by Indonesia and South Africa and implemented by the Palestinian National Authority, through which Jakarta has served as programme funding coordinator for Azerbaijan along with twenty other developing nations. Perhaps in corollary with these activities, Azerbaijan was the only former Soviet state to contribute to the United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation (UNFSSC) established by UN General Assembly Resolution 60/212 in December 2005.⁵¹ Azerbaijani representatives also attended the follow-up mechanisms NAASP Ministerial Conference on Capacity Building for Palestine in July 2008 and Second NAASP Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in October 2009, as well as the Asia-Africa Youth Forum of NAASP member countries on achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in August 2010.⁵²

After receiving a formal invitation to attend the 14th NAM Summit in Havana, Cuba in May 2006⁵³ along with delegations of Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, Azerbaijan was first encouraged to apply for full membership during the first state visit between foreign ministers Mammadyarov and Felipe Pérez Roque in September, which was suggested in the context of their concurrent chairmanship of the NAM CoB and OIC Council of Foreign Ministers.⁵⁴ These contacts were also facilitated by Soviet-era experience, as many senior officials in the Cuban government held degrees earned during educational exchanges for the training of foreign students at the State Oil Academy.⁵⁵ Cuban diplomats often emphasize that (in possible response to American sanctions imposed on Baku such as the International Traffic in Arms Regulations and Section 907) Azerbaijan was the only member of the CIS to vote in support of UN Resolution 48/16 on ending the US embargo in

⁵⁰ *Declaration on the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership*, adopted at the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM), Jakarta, 12-13 October 2009, <http://kemlu.go.id/Documents/NAASP/Hyperlink%201.pdf>.

⁵¹ UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), *How to Partner with Us*, http://ssc.undp.org/content/ssc/partner/how_to_contribute.html.

⁵² Azerbaijan Embassy to Indonesia, *Azerbaijan-Indonesia Relations*, <http://www.azembassy.or.id/eng/rel.shtml>; Asia-Africa Youth Forum, *Reviving Asia-Africa Spirit to Accelerate the Achievement of MDGs. Administrative Arrangements*, Bandung, 23-27 August 2010, p. 3, <http://sman28jkt.sch.id/userfiles/file/Aministrative%20arrangement%20AAYF%20final.rtf>.

⁵³ “Azerbaijan to be invited to international conference of Movement of non-aligned countries”, in *Trend.Az*, 27 May 2006, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/855109.html>.

⁵⁴ “Cuba invites Azerbaijan to apply for membership in Non Aligned Movement”, in *Today.Az*, 30 September 2006, <http://www.today.az/news/politics/30852.html>.

⁵⁵ “Cuban ambassador: Our energy industry operates on Azeri equipment”, in *News.Az*, 12 November 2009, <http://news.az/articles/politics/2283>.

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September 1993.⁵⁶ In February 2007, Cuban CoB Chair Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz was invited to a discussion by the Permanent Representatives of the member states of the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), in which he was provided with information on agenda item 27 “Protracted conflicts in the area GUAM and their implications for international peace, security and development” to be submitted to the 61st Session of the General Assembly.⁵⁷ During the same month, UN Permanent Representative and chair of the OIC Group Agshin Mehdiyev also participated in a joint delegation with Arab League (AL) and NAM officials, which met with UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon and Slovakian UNSC president Peter Burian to address Israeli archaeological excavation activities under the compound of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.⁵⁸ In September of the same year, both Roque and Minister of Culture and Tourism Abulfaz Qarayev attended the UNESCO-sponsored NAM Ministerial Meeting on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity in Tehran,⁵⁹ which resolved to establish the Non-Aligned Movement Centre for Human Rights and Cultural Diversity (NAMCHRCD) within the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁶⁰

The growing dissatisfaction with the performance of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs (US, Russia and France) during the Ilham Aliyev presidency and increasing appeals to institutions at the global level⁶¹ also fostered renewed contacts with members of NAM. However, despite previous expressions of common interest, NAM support for the Draft Resolution on the Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan introduced in the UN General Assembly in March 2008 was far from unanimous. While Mehdiyev in his new capacity as Ambassador to Cuba held a prior meeting with Díaz to request the backing of the NAM for the initiative,⁶² ultimately only 35 member and two observer states (roughly 30 percent) voted in favour and Angola, India and Vanuatu against, while at least 40 members abstained or were absent from the session entirely (including Cuba and the Islamic Republic of Iran).⁶³ Although

⁵⁶ Interview to Marcelo Caballero Torres, “Cuba calls on immediate return of Azerbaijan’s territories occupied by Armenia”, in *Trend.Az*, 28 December 2009, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/1608403.html>.

⁵⁷ *Chair Activities since the Summit* (NAM 2008/Doc.6), XV Ministerial Conference, Tehran, 27-30 July 2008, p. 43, <http://namiran.org/tehran-2008>.

⁵⁸ “AL-OIC-NAM delegation meets Ban, Burian over Aqsa Mosque”, in *Kuwaiti News Agency*, 10 February 2007, <http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1709705>.

⁵⁹ See List of Participants of the Ministerial Meeting on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity, Tehran, 3-4 September 2007, <http://namiran.org/tehran-2007>.

⁶⁰ UNESCO Executive Board, *Information on the Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on human rights and cultural diversity*, 27 February 2008, p. 9, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/Ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=158163>.

⁶¹ Elkhan Mekhtiyev, “Armenia-Azerbaijan Prague Process: Road Map to Peace or Stalemate for Uncertainty?”, in *CSRC Caucasus Series*, No. 05/23 (May 2005), p. 3, <http://www.da.mod.uk/Research-Publications/category/67/-0523-1204>; Taleh Ziyadov, “Nagorno-Karabakh Negotiations: Through the Prism of a Multi-Issue Bargaining Model”, in *International Negotiation*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2010), p. 119.

⁶² *Chair Activities since the Summit* (NAM 2008/Doc.6), cit., p. 74.

⁶³ UN General Assembly, *Official Records, 62nd Session, 86th Plenary Meeting (A/62/PV.86)*, 14 March 2008, <http://undocs.org/A/62/PV.86>.

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Mehdiyev also actively engaged with the Cuban government to secure its support, Havana responded that its concurrent position as NAM Chair prevented it from publicly taking a position, in addition to a general lack of awareness regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. The Iranian government extended an official apology that its absence was due to a technical mistake, and submitted a written note to the UN Secretary-General declaring its support for the resolution, although this did not affect the final tally.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the event served to galvanize cooperation, as in the interim period Baku actually increased its participation in NAM conventions, attending the Ministerial Meeting in Havana and the 15th Summit in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in April⁶⁵ and July 2009,⁶⁶ while then Ambassador to Indonesia and the Philippines Ibrahim Hajiyeve delivered an address to the Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development (SNAMMM) in Manila in March 2010.⁶⁷ In the period since its admission, Azerbaijan has sent several delegates representing the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs and the Azerbaijan Future Studies Society (AFSS) to the Third Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on the advancement of Women in Doha, Qatar, 12-14 February 2012,⁶⁸ while the Preparatory Senior Officials Meeting for the 16th Summit in Tehran, Iran in August recommended Azerbaijan to the attending foreign ministers as a candidate for election as Vice-Chair of the CoB for the European Region.⁶⁹ Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Mehdi Akhuzade also suggested that a NAM European Office would be established in Baku,⁷⁰ although this appears not to have taken place.⁷¹

Based upon the justification extended by Mammadyarov at the 16th Ministerial Conference and Commemorative Meeting in Bali, Indonesia to establish an additional platform for conflict resolution as well as to promote its position within wider international forums,⁷² Azerbaijan has produced two major achievements within the NAM during the period of its full membership. First, the supporting votes of NAM member states played an essential role in its second (and successful) campaign for a non-permanent UNSC seat representing the Group of Eastern

⁶⁴ Interview with former UN Permanent Representative and Ambassador to Cuba Agshin Mehdiyev, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 December 2014.

⁶⁵ *Report by Rapporteur-General* (NAM 2009/MM/DOC. 7/REV.1), cit., p. 1.

⁶⁶ *Report of the Rapporteur General* (NAM 2009/RG/Doc.2), XV Summit, Sharm El Sheikh, 11-16 July 2009, p. 1, <http://namiran.org/15th-summit>.

⁶⁷ “Azerbaijani ambassador addresses special non aligned movement ministerial meeting”, in *Today.Az*, 24 March 2010, <http://www.today.az/news/politics/64638.html>.

⁶⁸ See List of Participants of the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on the advancement of Women, Doha, 12-14 February 2012, <http://qatarconferences.org/nonalignedwomen/participants.php>.

⁶⁹ *Report of the Senior Officials Meeting* (NAM 2012/SOM/Doc.3/Corr.1), XVI Summit, Tehran, 26-31 August 2012, p. 4, <http://namiran.org/16th-senior-officials-meeting>.

⁷⁰ “Azerbaijan may host NAM European Office”, in *News.Az*, 29 August 2012, <http://news.az/articles/politics/67197>.

⁷¹ Interview with Agshin Mehdiyev, 18 December 2014.

⁷² “Elmar Mammadyarov: ‘The Non-Aligned Movement will be an additional platform for delivering Azerbaijan’s fair position on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to the wider international community’”, in *Azeri Press Agency*, 27 May 2011, <http://en.apa.az/news/148184>.

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European States from 2012 to 2013. By gaining an unprecedented position within the global *status quo* among former Soviet republics (also sought by Kyrgyzstan in recent years⁷³), Baku was able to extend its presence into entirely new issue areas, such as potential contributions to humanitarian aid and security in the Great Lakes subregion of Africa.⁷⁴ In tandem with this position, Azerbaijan also participated in the Non-Aligned Security Council Caucus along with Colombia, Guatemala, India, Morocco, Pakistan, Togo and South Africa.⁷⁵

Second, the landmark inclusion of paragraph 391 addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict under “Regional and Sub-Regional Political Issues” (the sole item related to Europe) in the Final Document of the Tehran Summit resolved that:

The Heads of State or Government [...] reaffirmed the importance of the principle of non-use of force enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and encouraged the parties to continue to seek a negotiated settlement of the conflict within the territorial integrity, sovereignty and the internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan.⁷⁶

Thus, for the first time, the Karabakh issue became a subject of broad recognition by governments otherwise far removed from the policy concerns of the South Caucasus or post-Soviet Eurasia. In addition, Ministry of Foreign Affairs personnel contend that the amendment to the paragraph between the Ministerial Meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh and the Tehran Summit, which replaced the neutral language of the former⁷⁷ with a direct reference to Azerbaijan’s position,⁷⁸ was the result of significant deliberation among member states, and therefore reflects a broad consensus reached through extended dialogue and debate rather than a biased or one-sided outcome.⁷⁹ Most recently, Azerbaijan served as chair of the 17th Ministerial Conference in Algiers, which was also addressed by representatives of Senegal, Palestine, Niger and Spain,⁸⁰ and has declared its intention to stand for election for CoB Chair for 2018-2021 at the 17th Summit to be held in Caracas,

⁷³ See statements by representatives of Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan during general debate: UN-OHRLLS, *Report of the 10th Annual Ministerial Meeting of Landlocked Developing Countries*, New York, 23 September 2011, p. 8-9, <http://unohrlls.org/?p=12691>.

⁷⁴ “Azerbaijan’s successful journey as a non-permanent member of the U.N. security council”, in *The Washington Times*, 10 December 2013, <http://wtim.es/1JDJD4u>.

⁷⁵ Azerbaijan was elected as member of the Security Council in 2012-2013. See UNSC website: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/members/elected.asp>.

⁷⁶ *Final Document* (NAM 2012/Doc.1/Rev.2), XVI Summit, Tehran, 26-31 August 2012, para. 391, <http://namiran.org/16th-summit>.

⁷⁷ *Final Document* (NAM 2012/CoB/Doc.1), Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau, Sharm El Sheikh, 7-10 May 2012, p. 106, <http://www.mfa.gov.eg/nam/documents/final%20document%20adopted%20by%20the%20ministerial%20meetings%209-10%20May.pdf>.

⁷⁸ *Final Document* (NAM 2012/Doc.1/Rev.2), XVI Summit, cit., p. 104.

⁷⁹ Interview with Qaya Mammadov, 9 December 2014.

⁸⁰ Sabina Ahmadova, “Azerbaijan chairs session of Ministerial Conference of Non-Aligned Movement”, in *Trend.Az*, 29 May 2014, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2279290.html>.

Venezuela.⁸¹ If successful, such a position would provide a paramount opportunity to utilize the NAM as a platform for pursuing its strategic objectives.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This analysis has sought to demonstrate that rather than representing a new direction in Azerbaijani foreign relations, membership in the NAM largely enhances its existing tendencies. Yet, at the same time it is possible that Azerbaijan has been inhibited from becoming more deeply involved in the activities of the NAM by its lack of common experience with the mid-20th century lineage of post-colonialism. Former officials assert that Afro-Asia has historically been a weak point in Azerbaijani foreign policy, as attested by the lack of embassies in many developing countries.⁸² Secondly, unlike Belarus, which endorsed NAM initiatives such as the New World Information Order (NWIO) as early as the 1980s via its individual seat in the UN General Assembly,⁸³ Azerbaijan has had little practical experience with the concept of “Third World solidarity” outside of Soviet-era doctrine. Thus, its representatives must become more active in the participatory structures and methodology of the NAM in order to move beyond simply balancing behaviour – or, aggregating support for its national interests among a larger number of states – to fully exploit its potential as a forum for developing alternative strategic approaches toward the prevailing international order. The most significant impact of Azerbaijan’s NAM membership on its internal politics is twofold. First, by providing it with a mooring in an international institution representing two-thirds of UN member states, it elevates the status of the balancing doctrine from a personal formula traditionally employed by the Aliyev presidencies, to a common set of policy objectives pursued by developing nations. Unlike deposed Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovich, who symbolically attempted to institute “non-aligned” status with a national law introduced in June 2010, Baku’s multidirectional diplomacy is now broadly recognized by the international community. Secondly, the seven-year “Azerbaijan 2020” national development plan initiated by decree of Illham Aliyev on 29 December 2012 makes explicit reference to having already achieved an exceptional position among its neighbour states:

In 2011, the real GDP tripled in comparison with 2003. In 2011, Azerbaijan accounted for over 70 per cent of the added value generated in the South Caucasus, thus becoming a regional leader. [...] From the standpoint of economic development, Azerbaijan will advance from being a regional leader to become a highly competitive participant in the system of international economic relations.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Interview with Qaya Mammadov, 9 December 2014.

⁸² Interview with Agshin Mehdiyev, 18 December 2014.

⁸³ United Press International, *U.N. Notebook; Western media practice ‘Information Imperialism’*, 17 November 1986.

⁸⁴ Development Concept “Azerbaijan-2020”, cit., p. 2, 7.

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This agenda suggests similarities with the trajectory pursued by rising Global South nations that have utilized forums such as the NAM to promote and garner support for their national concerns. As they do not place demands on aspirant states to implement domestic reforms as a criterion for membership, it is possible that the NAM and other organizations related to Asian regionalism and South-South cooperation are increasingly attractive to Baku as it resists external pressures for democratization. Having achieved a preponderant status within its immediate region despite unresolved conflict and loss of territory, Azerbaijan is no longer forced to rely upon the models of governance presented by Russia, Turkey or Iran – or for that matter the US and Europe – as a continual frame of reference for its own evolution. Thus, the manner in which the executive defines the country’s leadership role in the South Caucasus and beyond will increasingly move away from a framed neo-Cold War “choice” between committing to accession requirements mandated by Brussels versus Russian-sponsored regional integration efforts in the post-Soviet space, towards the example set by leading Asian and Latin American nations that have striven to determine their own path between hegemonic powers.

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