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## **Cuba Revives Non-aligned Movement With A Successful Summit**

*by Mike Leffert*

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Cuba hosted the 14th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Havana Sept. 11-16. The NAM is a grouping of nations, now 118-strong, set up in 1961 by Third World nations that wanted to avoid being crushed during the Cold War either by Washington or Moscow by not aligning with either. With the end of the Cold War, the group has struggled to find relevance.

Member states now believe they have found that relevance as Cuba takes over the presidency of the organization for the next three years. Cuba seeks to guide the revival of the movement as a defender of Third World interests disregarded by global capitalism. More than 50 heads of state attended the summit, as did UN Secretary General UN Kofi Annan. The membership is composed of 53 countries of Africa, 38 of Asia along with four associates, and 24 from Latin America and the Caribbean. Haiti and Saint Kitts-Nevis became members during the summit, bringing the total to 118.

In addition to Latin America's full members, Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay attended as observers. The region's representation is expected to grow again with the addition of one more nation. Argentina dropped out in 1991 when then President Carlos Menem (1989-1999) changed his country's status to aligned, with the US. President Nestor Kirchner now wants back in and sent a guest delegation headed by Argentina's Ambassador to Cuba Dario Alessandro.

### ***US absence is China's advantage***

The US was absent from the summit, which it usually attends as an observer. With the Soviet Union gone, the US is now the sole target of NAM's objectives, the defense of multilateralism and principles of international law. US economic and military hegemony and unilateralism are seen as the impediments to those objectives. The US had little to say about its absence.

Chief of the US interest section in Havana Michael Parmly noted his country had a better relationship with previous host Malaysia and told reporters, "We simply did not pick up the invitation." Latin American analysts tracking declining US influence in the region called that decision a mistake. "Bush likes to use the saying, 'You're either with us or against us,' and they are writing off the summit because they are non-aligned, which to them means they are not with the US," said Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) in Washington.

Other analysts called the US out of touch, doggedly imposing trade agreements that harm the poor while raising the rhetoric about the danger of populism, as they call recent leftward regional trends. As the US sat out the summit, China made known its plans to hold bilateral meetings with Latin American governments to strengthen ties. China's imports from Latin America quintupled to US

\$20.3 billion and exports tripled to US\$15.4 billion from 2000 to 2004, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and all parties seem eager for more.

As a sidelight, the summit provided a first opportunity for Raul Castro to make a high-level public appearance since taking over interim leadership responsibilities from his brother Fidel (see NotiCen, 2006-08-03). Fidel Castro was recovering from surgery and did not appear at the meetings but was reported to have had several meetings with chiefs of state and with Annan. He was in touch by phone with the proceedings, according to reports. Raul ran the sessions and gave the closing address. There was broad agreement among participants that Cuban leadership handled the meetings successfully.

There were several important accomplishments, not least an announcement that Pakistan and India would return to peace talks suspended last July. Cuba was also able to count as a positive result the inclusion in the final document of a call to the US to lift the blockade and return to Cuba the territory of Guantanamo Bay. Other US antagonists, Venezuela and Bolivia, benefited from summit solidarity. The final declaration reiterated the legitimacy of Venezuela's elected government and expressed its "concern for the aggressive policies of the United States against Venezuela."

Bolivia and its President Evo Morales won a statement of "invariable support and solidarity with the government and people of Bolivia in moments in which external forces wish to disintegrate the country, destabilize its institutions, and put its democracy in danger." Cuba was also successful in carrying through to a consensus document the assertion that "there is not just one model of democracy and this is not the patrimony of any one country or region." In this, two-thirds of the world's sovereign nations challenged not just the US but also European criticisms of Third World democratic systems. What is remarkable is not the statements in themselves but that they come at a time when Latin American and global policies are in process of profound change.

The US has rebuffed regimes with which it differs to an unprecedented degree just as these regimes are demonstrating vastly increased powers of their own. Venezuela has emerged as the backbone of a growing alliance with some of the US's least favored nations. Expanding the principles Yet, Cuba denied that the NAM has become an alliance against the US. Repeatedly, Cuban diplomats stated that the movement is not lining up against any country but rather against unilateralism in international relations. It was pointed out that several NAM countries are in close cooperation with the US, including India, Pakistan, Egypt, and Indonesia. In the region, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador, all close to the US, were present, either as members or associates.

Cuban Foreign Relations Minister Felipe Perez Roque said that opposition to coercive measures against any country, terrorism, preventive war, and the thesis of regime change would be added to the principles of Bandung upon which the NAM was founded. The Bandung principles were formulated in 1954 by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Chinese Prime Minister Chou En Lai. Paraphrased, the principles are:

Value human rights;

Respect sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations;

Recognize equality of all races and between nations, however small;

Avoid interference in other nation's internal affairs;

Value each nation's right to self-defense, separately or collectively;

Not undertake defense collaboration that specially serves the interests of superpowers and oppose pressure to do so;

Not threaten any country's territory or freedom;

Resolve international differences by negotiation, conciliation, arbitration or legal means while adhering to UN charter;

Promote common needs and cooperation;

Respect international justice and responsibility. The summit conferees readily adapted these Cold War principles to current problems these nations face in dealing with the monolithic interests of what has come to be called "the North" as they seek South-South cooperation. In a Declaration on the Purposes and Principles and the Role of the Non-Aligned Movement in the Present International Juncture, they adapted these ideas to meet what they termed "an extremely complex international situation." "On a political level," read the document, "there is a need to promote the goal of creating a multi-polar world order, based on respect for the application of the principles of International Law and the UN Charter and the reinforcement of multilateralism. On an economic level, underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, and marginalization have intensified within the ongoing process of globalization, aggravating the structural imbalances and inequalities that affect the international economic order. The security and well-being of our nations are being challenged as never before." A strengthened Cuba fortifies NAM Cuba's hand in international affairs has been strengthened enormously by the success of this meeting as has that of its main strategic partner, Venezuela. Cuban leaders had ample opportunity to meet and plan with some of the main adversaries to the current world order, including the presidents of Iran and Syria and high-level officials of North Korea, in a setting where they are not seen as part of an axis of evil but rather as sovereign nations under threat from a unilateralist nuclear power. Cuba was also strengthened by having guided the meeting capably in the absence of Fidel, signaling that, should its leader not return to full power, those left in charge are well-capable of running the country's affairs and continuing to increase their influence on the world stage. Cuban officials made it clear they would strive to convert the conclusions of the summit to an action plan to be implemented during Cuba's three-year tenure as NAM leader. The action plan will convert broad goals into specific actions to be undertaken by the NAM countries acting in concert and with coordination among the many organizations, such as the G-77. Ministerial meetings are to be revived, "devoted to development and economic issues, including trade and finance." Cuba's vice president of the Council of State Carlos Lage Davila opened the sessions with a speech reiterating the toll that First World "extreme consumerism" has taken on Third World peoples, on the environment, and on the drain on resources and human capital. "Our environment deteriorates as a result of the activities of an irrational society that encourages extreme forms of consumerism, a way of life rich countries have imposed on their own societies and on ours. Unemployment, poverty, hunger, and illnesses are foisted upon thousands of millions of people. A new category, that of surplus humanity, has been created by neoliberalism," he said. Lage summarized the problem of terrorism as "born of injustice, a lack of education and culture, of poverty and inequality, of the humiliation suffered by whole

nations, of the contempt toward and the underestimation of belief systems, of arrogance, of abuse and of crimes. It is not a consequence of radical ideologies that must be swept off the face of the earth with bombs and missiles. Hypocrisy and double standards are in plain sight in the discourse of the powerful." Getting down to the role NAM is to play, Lage told his audience, "Another world is possible and urgently needed, and wars are not needed to create it. If we grow in conscience, if we join forces, if we become determined to defend our rights with ideas and steadfastness, we can build such a world." The NAM countries represent two-thirds of the countries of the UN and 55% of the world's people. Present at the summit were 56 heads of state and 90 foreign ministers. Latin America and Caribbean members are: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Granada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, St.Kitts-Nevis, St.Vincent and the Grenadines, Santa Lucia, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela. Observer countries of the region are: Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

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