

Russian Foreign Policy After Soviet Collapse (Continuity and Change)

Dr. Vipin Kumar Niraj

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Upadhi Mahavidyalaya, Pilibhit
(M.J.P.Rohilkhand University, Bareilly)

The Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991. The new Russia emerged as a sovereign state on the map of the World and as successor of the Soviet Union. There were some expectations in Russia and the West that the collapse of the erstwhile the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war would led to more peaceful world but it became a day dream. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Garbachev principles were fully reflected in new Russian foreign policy. Perestroika and Glasnost policy was famous that day. Perestroika which means restructuring and Glasnost means openness was applied in all sectors of Soviet system. President Boris Yeltsin initially followed Gorbachev's foreign policy in International affairs and tried to develop close relations with the developed world, especially the United States of America, After experiment at NATO eastward expansion the Russian foreign policy begin to take a new shape after initial pro-west euphoria and it become more pragmatic and independent.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Foreign Policy of Russia had originated in a difficult situation. New Russia was confronted with tremendous international problems. First there was a strong element of continuity from the past soviet system in all spheres of the activities of the new state, including its foreign policy. One of the significant consequences of the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union was the emergence of its constituent republics as independent and sovereign republics. Russia emerged as the most important successor state of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics).

After the loss of super power status it had to develop a frame work for playing new role in international policies, it had to redefine its organize its foreign policy. Although it of area and retained complete control over the Soviet military power including stockpiles of system in addition to tremendous human and material resources.

The impact of the disintegration of the Soviet Union had resulted in the undermining of state structures and activities including economic life there by creating a general instability and crisis in the country.

The fact that Russia was recognized as the successor state of the Soviet Union meant assumption of enormous responsibility and additonal burden for it. New geo-strategic, political and economic challenges emerged before new Russia. The economy was in bad shape and Russia needed foreign assistance for economic restructuring. Moreover the breakup of Soviet Union also effected its geo-political location. It lost its direct land access to Europe. It also lost much ot its sea-outlets in the south.

The breakup of the socialist community and the warsaw-pact ented the traditional buffer-zone between Russia and the West.

It also created a number of new independent states devoid of traditional friendship and relationship with Russia. The disintegration of the Soviet Union also created a number of domestic and other problems for Russia with some twenty five million Russians spread throughout the successor states. The potential for the conflict got manifested involving outright hostilities with some states.,

The forces of nationalism and ethnicity began to raise their head. The institutions created during the cold war were dissolved.

During the seven decades after 1917 the discussion of international affairs in Moscow was confined within the framework of an elaborate structure of ideas concerning the Soviet role in the world as the champion of international progress and proletarian revolution with the end of the USSR in 1991 socialism as the state ideology vanished and western liberal ideas of democracy market reforms human rights gained acceptance in new Russia the forces of nationalism and ethnicity began to raise their head. The institutions created during the cold war (party states the Warsaw-pact, COMECON etc.)

were dissolved; the new independent nations began to look towards the west for help assistance and guidance in different walks of life

These developments can be perceived with some justification as renouncing by the ruling elites of the ideology of the former Soviet Union and adoption of western liberalism which is meant to serve as the basis of democratic Russia's newly proclaimed partnership with the west. The acceptance of rival ideology did not take place in a single day. In fact, the movement away from ideological rigidity that began in the 1960's continued in the 1970's in a wide range of areas. Soviet scholars began to argue that socialism could best emerge from a sufficiently advanced economic system the primacy of scientific technological progress and the need for integration with the world market began to be more and more emphasized. This eventually culminated in the 'new political thinking' propounded by Gorbachev. 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost' were aimed at restructuring the socialist ideology on which domestic polity was based, whereas the concept of 'new political thinking' was aimed at bringing the Soviet foreign policy out of the narrow confines of the framework of class struggle in international affairs, which hitherto had guided Soviet foreign policy. The 'new political thinking' with its stress on common human values interdependent and indivisible security, became the ideology of 'de-ideologisation' of Soviet foreign policy. The drastic turnaround in international affairs since the promulgation of 'new thinking' led finally to the end of cold war and the beginning of a new phase in the history of the world. During the period of Gorbachev many of the central foreign policy pursuits had economic rational, nuclear and conventional disarmament allied to reduction in military expenditure after 1988 were part of a long-term goal of reducing the unsustainable demand of military budget these concerns with economic objectives were continued by Russia.

Prior of August 1991 some success was apparent in the cultivation of international ties. Declaration of friendship and co-operation were made with Poland (October 1990), Mongolia (Feb 1991), Czechoslovakia (May 1991) and a number of agreements were reached with the federal units of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Germany. What is important is that so long as the USSR existed, it was not a legitimate foreign policy actor in the eyes of the other states and international institutions. It was against such a background that new Russia began to organize and operate its foreign policy.

The first phase which got underway well before 1991 was dominated by a whole sole reaction against the traditional Soviet foreign policy doctrine. It had two main aspects; the twist was a rejection of Stalinist militarism and economic isolationism. It culminated in the endorsing of the vision of a new peaceful and increasingly economically integrated world order. This had a dramatic effect on Russia's international image and it helped to ease soviet acceptance of the international retreats of 1990 and '91.

The second aspect of reaction against the pre-existing Soviet doctrine was the swing towards an almost unconditional westerners. This become most marked in statements which came from the Russian foreign ministry in the initial months of the Russian statehood in 1992. It was repeatedly declared that Russia intended to enter the club of the most dynamically developing democratic countries and that it was the missing component of the democratic pole of the northern hemisphere and that it was about to return to Europe and so on. While a minority of conservative minded writers intended to emphasise on military and security means self-described realists maintained that Russia had no option but to throw in its lot with the west whatever the underlying tensions and conflicts of interests. They were not calling for a strategic change in policy, but were asking for a more clear-eyed application of it.

Criticism of particular aspects of the foreign policy of the new post communist Russia government was not slow in appearing however. This change in the trend of foreign policy did not mean that Russia had totally broken away from the legacy of the Soviet Union. The foreign policy of Russia continued to be influenced by the legacy of the USSR. Its self- proclaimed status as the legal successor state of the Soviet Union binds it to all the international commitments entered into by the former regime, not least in the sphere of nuclear and conventional disarmament and military withdrawal from east central Europe. In the areas in which no legal obligation pertained, Russia had the choice of either continuing or forsaking the options pursued that had not necessarily completed in the later period of Soviet Foreign Policy. Consequently issues like abandonment of third world allies had been of topical concern to the Russian leaders. Moreover while Russia had not succeeded the borders of the USSR in their entirety. While frontiers had conceded, it inherited a number of unresolved issues. Despite dissenting oppositions, yeltsin and his team were able to act independently at first in foreign policy. As far as policy towards the west is concerned the changes have been cautious, there has been a sharper focus on economic issues. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow has drastically reduced the geographical scope of its international activities. Faced with a severe domestic socio-economic crisis, the Russia federation has chosen to curtail, though not completely relinquish, the global role of its predecessor. Such a diplomatic retreat of the superpower's main successor state has been the most conspicuous in Africa, Latin America and south-east Asia Russia's virtual abandonment of these areas can be considered as a direct continuation of Gorbachev's policy of 'new thinking'. The focus of Russian federation is almost exclusively on matters of potential economic benefit. Russian foreign policy is influenced to a substantial degree by the domestic process of political and economic reforms. By assisting Russian's transition towards democratic governance and a market-oriented economy, the international community has also played a significant role in shaping Moscow's international behavior. Such assistance appears to be critical in helping Russia to fight the persisting soviet legacies as well as the rising nationalist challenges.

An identifiable trend in Moscow's foreign policy is the shift from an ideologically to a pragmatically based foreign policy. Russian foreign policy is driven less by the desire to spread its ideas to the far concerns of the earth than by the desires to ensure the territorial integrity and economic growth. Now more decisions are

made according to a cost-benefit analysis that emphasizes concrete benefits to be gained by Russia in pursuing a particular line of policy is now coherent or stable. It is still vulnerable to nationalist overtones and open to rapid fluctuations based on the different conceptions that various actors involved in the Russian political system have concerning the objectives that Russia should strive in the future.

REFERENCE

1. Zwick, Peter, Soviet Foreign Relation, Process and Policy (Prentice hall, new Jersey,1990)
2. Vlyukaev, Aleksei, Reforming the Russian economy, (CRCE, 1996, London)
3. Trofinenko, Henary, Russian National Interests and the current crists in Russian. (Ashgate, Sydney, 1999)
4. Shearman, Peter, Ed Russian Foreign Policy since 1990 (West view press, Oxford, 1995.
5. Nelson, D Lynn kuzes, Irrinary, Radical Reform in Yeltsin's Russia: Political economic and Social Dimension (M.E Sharpe, New York, 1995)
6. Korhai, Janos the socialist system and the political economy of communism (Clarendon press) Oxford, 1922)
7. Kehet, Erogor Kozhemiakin V. Alexander the feign policy of the Russian federation, (Macmillan, London, 1977)
8. Imam, Zafar, Soviet Foreign policy 1917-90, (Sterling publication, New Delhi, 1991)